

INTERCOLLEGIATE COACHES' EXPERIENCES AND STRATEGIES
FOR COACHING FIRST-YEAR ATHLETES

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Abstract

University student-athletes have reported difficulties balancing the rigors of academics, athletics, and their personal lives (Heller, Bloom, Neil, & Salmela, 2005). These challenges may be exacerbated for first-year athletes who are transitioning from high school and often living away from home for the first time. Given that coaches significantly influence their athletes' experiences (Bloom, Falcão, & Caron, 2014), their coaching styles and support may ease this transition process. Thus, the purpose of the current study was to investigate university coaches' perceptions, experiences, and strategies used with first-year university student-athletes. Eight highly successful and experienced Canadian university coaches were individually interviewed. The interview data was analyzed with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The results revealed that coaches' ultimate goal of helping their athletes succeed in life after university influenced their coaching practices throughout the athletes' entire university experience from first year to graduation. Coaching first-year athletes started with recruiting individuals who were highly skilled and who would fit in with the other athletes on their team both on and off the field. Once selected, coaches began building trusting relationships with their first-year athletes that were supported by the leadership skills of their senior athletes and by incorporating team building activities into training. Coaches developed their first-year athletes' athletic skills by creating training programs that addressed each players' weaknesses. At the same time, coaches ensured their academic success by monitoring their progress and encouraging the use of academic resources that were available from their university. The coaches also attended to their athletes' personal needs which resulted from coaching individuals who were living away from home for the first time and who were susceptible to social opportunities that could distract them from their academic and athletic responsibilities if not carefully monitored by the coaches. In sum, this study adds to the body of literature of effective coaching practices for university coaches by providing one of the first empirical accounts of coaching first-year student-athletes. The current results benefit both coaches and athletes by highlighting the common challenges of a first-year university athlete, as well as by offering useful strategies that can help resolve such challenges and ease this transition process.

Résumé

Les étudiants-athlètes universitaires ont de la difficulté à équilibrer les rigueurs associées aux études, aux sports et à leurs vies personnelles (Heller, Bloom, Neil, & Salmela, 2005). Ces défis peuvent être exacerbés pour les étudiants-athlètes de première année qui sont en transition du secondaire à l'université et qui vivent souvent loin de leur domicile pour la première fois. Étant donné que les entraîneurs influencent l'expérience de leurs athlètes (Bloom, Falcão, & Caron, 2014), leurs styles d'entraînement et de soutien pourraient faciliter cette transition. Cette étude visait à identifier et à expliquer les perspectives, les stratégies ainsi que les expériences des entraîneurs universitaires à l'égard des étudiants-athlètes universitaires de première année. Des entrevues semi-structurées et ouvertes ont été menées avec huit entraîneurs à succès provenant du circuit universitaire canadien. La démarche de Braun et Clarke (2006) a été sollicitée afin d'analyser et d'interpréter les données. Les résultats ont révélé que le but ultime des entraîneurs universitaires, soit d'aider leurs athlètes à avoir du succès dans la vie après leurs années universitaires, a influencé leurs pratiques d'entraînement à travers la carrière universitaire de leurs athlètes de la première année jusqu'à la remise des diplômes. L'entraînement des étudiants-athlètes de première année a débuté avec le recrutement d'individuels doués et pouvant s'adapter aux autres joueurs de l'équipe à l'extérieur et sur le terrain de jeu. Une fois sélectionnés, les entraîneurs ont commencé à établir des relations de confiance avec leurs athlètes de première année qui étaient appuyées par les compétences en leadership de leurs athlètes seniors et par les activités d'esprit d'équipe intégrées dans les entraînements d'équipe. Les entraîneurs ont développé les aptitudes athlétiques de leurs athlètes de première année en créant des programmes d'entraînement qui adressaient les faiblesses de chaque joueur. En même temps, les entraîneurs s'assuraient de leur succès académique en surveillant leur progression et en encourageant l'utilisation des ressources scolaires disponibles à leur université. Les entraîneurs s'occupaient aussi de leurs besoins personnels qui découlaient du fait qu'ils entraînaient des individuels qui vivaient loin de leur domicile pour la première fois et qui étaient susceptible aux occasions sociales qui pourraient les distraire de leurs responsabilités scolaires et athlétiques si elles n'étaient pas suivies attentivement par leurs entraîneurs. En résumé, cette étude ajoute à la littérature concernant les pratiques d'entraînement efficaces pour les entraîneurs universitaires en fournissant l'un des premiers portraits empiriques de l'entraînement des étudiants-athlètes de première année. Ces résultats bénéficient aux entraîneurs et aux athlètes en surlignant les défis communs des étudiants-athlètes universitaires de première année ainsi qu'en offrant des stratégies qui peuvent aider à résoudre ces enjeux et faciliter cette transition.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS; www.cis-sic.ca) is the national governing body of intercollegiate athletics in Canada and offers 21 national championships in 12 different sports to 55 member universities represented by over 11,000 student-athletes (Canadian Interuniversity Sport [CIS], 2013). CIS's mandate is to promote excellence in both athletics and academics by enhancing student-athlete experiences and satisfaction (CIS, 2013). As such, student-athletes are provided with high quality education and opportunities to train at high-class facilities and with top-level coaches. An outcome of intercollegiate athletics is that it provides an environment for student-athletes to build supportive and trusting friendships with their teammates, while developing life skills and values such as self-confidence, communication, and leadership that will help them grow as individuals (Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). In short, intercollegiate student-athletes in Canada enjoy the benefits of high-quality educational and athletic experiences.

Despite the many positives that accrue from participating in intercollegiate athletics, there are also some drawbacks. Due to the high levels of time committed to their athletics, intercollegiate student-athletes commonly struggle with the balance of academics, with personal issues, and with training (Heller, Bloom, Neil, & Salmela, 2005; Kennedy, Tamminen, & Holt, 2013). Additionally, they may experience social isolation from outside of their athletic environments (Miller & Kerr, 2002) and over-identify themselves as athletes rather than as students (Miller & Kerr, 2003). As such, research has shown that intercollegiate student-athletes have underperformed academically (Rishe, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001), were less able to develop careers outside sports (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996), experienced social anxiety

(Storch, Storch, Killiany, & Roberti, 2005), distress (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003), and fatigue (Kennedy et al., 2013). Hence, the unique challenges and demands of participation in intercollegiate athletics can potentially disrupt their academic achievements, social network, and career development opportunities outside sports.

Some of the drawbacks of being an intercollegiate athlete may be exacerbated for first-year student-athletes who are transitioning from high school to university (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Papanikolaou, Nikolaidis, Patsiaouras, & Alexopoulos, 2003; Tracey & Corlett, 1995; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). For instance, first-year university student-athletes may experience lower self-esteem as a result of going from one of the best players on their high school team to a player with lower status on their university team (Papanikolaou et al., 2003). Also, some of them may have unrealistic expectations of advancing to professional athletics and commit too much of their time and energy to their athletic development instead of their academic achievement (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Papanikolaou et al., 2003). Moreover, some qualitative studies have revealed that adjusting to university involved many sources of stress including balancing academics and athletics, training intensity, high performance expectations, and relationships with coaches (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Tracey & Corlett, 1995). Taken together, these results suggest that athletic involvement adds a significant amount of stress and challenges to first year student-athletes, and they may need appropriate support and skills to cope with these stressors and challenges.

One person who has a significant influence on the student-athletes' experience is their coach (Baker, Côté, & Hawes, 2000; Baker, Yardley, & Côté, 2003; Bloom, Falcão, & Caron, 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). For example, Baker and colleagues (2000, 2003) have shown that athletes reported higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of anxiety when their coaches helped them prepare mentally, physically, and technically for competitions. Further,

intercollegiate coaches' jobs go beyond improving athletic performance of the athletes. Research has indicated that expert coaches aimed to develop their athletes academically and personally by building trusting coach-athlete relationships and by supporting them on matters outside of sport (Côté & Salmela, 1996; Duchesne, Bloom, & Sabiston, 2011; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Wooden, 1988). For example, Hall of Fame university basketball coach Pat Summitt once said, "a coach is far more than a strategist or a disciplinarian. You are a particular form of crisis counselor and interim substitute parent" (Summitt & Jenkins, 1998, p. 68). Similarly, Vallée and Bloom interviewed highly successful Canadian intercollegiate coaches and found that these coaches empowered and encouraged each athlete with the ultimate goal of creating positive environments that would teach their athletes life skills and improve their self-confidence.

The athlete-centered approach that focuses on positive coach-athlete relationships and individual athlete's empowerment may be particularly important for athletes during significant life transitions (Duchesne et al., 2011). Duchesne and colleagues interviewed highly successful intercollegiate coaches with substantial experience coaching international athletes, and they found these coaches invested time building personal relationships and providing social support both inside and outside the athletic settings for their international athletes. The goal of these coaches was to help their international athletes adjust to their new environments and to excel in both academics and athletics. As such, supportive coach-athlete relationships and personal support from coaches may be particularly important for helping and developing first-year university student-athletes during transitions from high school.

Two theoretical models may be particularly relevant in exploring the perceptions, experiences, and coaching strategies of expert coaches for coaching first-year student-athletes

who are transitioning from high school to university. More specifically, the coaching model (CM; Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995) implies that the coaches' goal is to develop their athletes. To achieve this goal, coaches begin by assessing three peripheral components, namely coach's characteristics, athletes' characteristics, and contextual factors. For example, coaches assess their own coaching styles, their athletes' maturity level, and whether they are coaching team or individual sports. Coaches then incorporate this assessment to their decisions and actions during the coaching process that includes three primary components called organization, training, and competition. Organization refers to carrying out tasks that establish optimal conditions for athlete development, including seasonal plans and player selection. Training refers to variables related to helping their athletes acquire and improve skills for competitive performance such as coaches' intervention styles and pedagogical methods. Competition refers to those coaching tasks, throughout the day of the competition, that include game plan rehearsals and pre-game warm-ups. In sum, coaches' understanding of the peripheral factors that include their own characteristics, athletes' characteristics, and contextual factors influence their coaching process made up of organization, training, and competition, and the subsequent athlete development. The CM was used to explore the coaches' knowledge of their first-year athletes' characteristics and challenges during transitions from high school, and how coaches apply this knowledge to adjust their coaching process accordingly.

Another theoretical framework that guided the current study is the multidimensional model of leadership (MML; Chelladurai, 1993) which focuses on effective coach leadership behaviours. It proposes that effective coach leadership involves interactions among the coaches, athletes, and situational elements, which in turn produce high levels of athlete performance and satisfaction. Importantly, coach behaviours are the most effective when they are preferred by the

individual athletes and when they match the situational requirements in their coaching environments. For example, less experienced athletes may prefer their coach to give them more feedback compared to more experienced athletes, while intercollegiate athletes may require their coach to acknowledge their educational demands. In sum, the MML proposes that coaches must adjust their behaviours to match the preference of their athletes and the requirements of their coaching environments. Hence, the current study incorporated the MML to investigate the coaches' understanding of their first-year student-athletes' preferences and the coaching requirements with first-year athletes as well as how they apply this knowledge to make adjustments to their behaviours to improve athlete performance and satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to investigate expert university team sport coaches' perceptions, experiences, and coaching strategies used with first year university student-athletes who are making transitions from high school to university.

Research Questions

1. What are their perceptions about the transitional experiences faced by first-year university student-athletes? 2. What are the common challenges faced by first-year student-athletes during their transitions from high school to university? 3. What are the coaching strategies used to support first-year student-athletes during their transitions, both inside and outside of the sport setting? 4. How do coaches behave and/or coach differently with first-year athletes compared to more experienced athletes?

Significance of the Study

Coaching research at the intercollegiate level has focused primarily on the general population of student-athletes. As such, there has been little research on the experiences of first-

year intercollegiate athletes from the perspective of the head coach. This study identified the coaches' perceptions, experiences, and strategies for coaching first-year university student-athletes. The information gathered from this study adds to the resources that coaches can use to effectively support and develop athletes who are going through a transition. Specifically, it offers guidelines and strategies to help first-year university student-athletes adjust to new environments, and positively influence their development, health, and overall academic and athletic experiences.

Delimitations

For the purpose of the study, the following delimitations were identified:

1. Participants were, at the time of the interview, head coaches of CIS basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey teams, coaching male athletes.
2. Participants had been a head coach of a CIS team for a minimum of 10 years.

Limitations

For the purpose of the study, the following limitations were identified:

1. The results may only be indicative of intercollegiate level athletics.
2. The results may only be indicative of Canadian coaches and athletes.
3. The results may only be indicative of coaches' views, and not indicative of athletes' views.
4. The results may only be indicative of male athletes.

Operational Definitions

Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS): the official governing body of Canadian intercollegiate athletics, which offers 21 national championships in 12 different sports: basketball, cross country, curling, soccer, swimming, track and field, volleyball, wrestling, ice hockey,

football, rugby, and field hockey. CIS includes over 11,000 student-athletes represented by 55 member universities (www.cis-sic.ca).

Interdependent-team sport: any sport where “team members coordinate their efforts and performances to produce a team performance outcome” (Widmeyer & Williams, 1991, p. 548). Examples include ice hockey, basketball, volleyball, soccer, and football.

First-year student-athlete: defined as a student in his/her first year in university with a full-time student status, as well as a varsity athlete status in a team competing in the CIS.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Previous empirical research has explored the knowledge of expert coaches and leaders and how they applied their knowledge in their work. This chapter consists of two major sections discussing two theoretical frameworks and related research that guided the current study. The first section will discuss the coaching model by Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, and Russell (1995), which has provided a conceptual basis for numerous research studies that investigated effective coaching. The second section will discuss the multidimensional model of leadership by Chelladurai (1993), as well as the research that examined the internal composition of successful leadership by various types of leaders, including coaches.

Coaching Model

Recognizing the need for a theoretical framework in the coaching research domain, Côté and colleagues (1995) interviewed 17 expert gymnastics coaches to conceptualize their knowledge. All interviewees had a minimum of 10 years of coaching experience and had developed at least one international and two national level gymnasts. The results identified several important factors of successful coaching which led to the creation of the coaching model (CM; Côté et al., 1995; Appendix A). The CM provides a systematic view of coaching by broadly capturing the most influential factors and emphasizing the relationships among these factors. According to the CM, coaches have a common goal of the development of their athletes/teams, and the achievement of this goal is influenced by three primary factors called *Organization*, *Training*, and *Competition*. These primary factors make up the *coaching process*, because the coach's decisions and actions in these areas directly impact the achievement of their goals. The CM also includes three peripheral factors, namely *Coach's Personal Characteristics*,

Athletes' Personal Characteristics and Level of Development, and *Contextual Factors*. Coaches assess the peripheral factors to develop a *mental model of the athletes'/team's potential*. This mental model is the coach's estimation of the capabilities of the athletes/team and informs the coach of what needs to be done in regards to the primary factors to achieve their goals. Hence, the peripheral factors indirectly impact the achievement of the goal through their influence on this estimated potential.

The CM has served as the conceptual framework for research that has examined coaching knowledge and behaviours in university team sports (e.g., Bloom, Stevens, & Wickwire, 2003; Duchesne, Bloom, & Sabiston, 2011; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Vallée and Bloom interviewed highly successful Canadian team sport coaches to investigate their perceptions on building university programs. Among their results, coaches used their organizational skills to build and maintain successful programs. A crucial element of their organizational skills was having a vision that included developing athletes' athletic and personal skills. In another study, Bloom and colleagues (2003) conducted focus group interviews with Canadian intercollegiate coaches to study aspects of team building. The results revealed that team building was a complex process involving many organizational tasks such as creating seasonal plans, recruitment, working with assistant coaches, and planning social activities. The following sections discuss each primary and peripheral component of the CM in more detail.

Organization. Côté and colleagues (1995) defined the *organization* component as "applying [coaches'] knowledge towards establishing optimal conditions for training and competition by structuring and coordinating the tasks involved in reaching the goal" (p. 9). More specifically, Côté and Salmela (1996) found that coaches' organizational tasks mainly included working with parents and assistants, helping athletes with personal concerns, planning training,

and monitoring weight and aesthetics. As such, organization has been considered one of the most critical aspects of successful coaching (Côté & Salmela, 1996; Duchesne et al., 2011; Gilbert, Côté, & Mallett, 2006; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). In fact, Gilbert and associates found that the number of annual hours devoted to administrative tasks were as many as the number of hours spent in direct contact with athletes during training and competition at the intercollegiate level.

Vallée and Bloom (2005) also found that organizational tasks for expert team sport coaches included creating seasonal plans, preparing practices, recruitment, and managing injuries. Notably, an important organizational component was having a vision. Vision was the coaches' full perspective of the program which encompassed their long-term goals of what they wanted to achieve with their teams. Importantly, their fundamental individual goal was to help their athletes develop athletically, as well as academically and personally. This goal of holistic development was conveyed through most of their coaching tasks. For example, coaches taught skills and values (e.g., controlling emotions, communication, independence, and respect) that helped the athletes succeed both inside and outside the sport setting. Additionally, Duchesne and colleagues (2011) have shown that the vision of holistic athlete development was particularly important during interviews with American university coaches who had lots of experience coaching international athletes. Because these athletes had particular challenges relating to their transition to new environments, coaches used organizational skills such as educating the athletes about the rules and regulations of American universities and closely monitoring their academic progress to help their athletes adjust and excel. Collectively, the aforementioned studies illustrate the different organizational tasks involved in coaching, which vary depending on the specific demands of the athletes and sport contexts such as individual sports, team sports, and coaching international athletes during transitions.

Training. Côté and colleagues (1995) described the *training* component as "applying [coaches'] knowledge towards helping athletes acquire and perform different skills in training" (p. 9). It involves the coaches' intervention styles and pedagogical methods in teaching their athletes the necessary skills for competitions (Bloom 2002; Côté et al., 1995). In team sport settings, Bloom also divided training into *physical*, *tactical*, *technical*, and *mental* elements. Coaches spend many hours in direct contact with their athletes to facilitate their learning and development during training (Bloom, 2002; Gilbert et al., 2006; Leite, Coelho, & Sampaio, 2011). Hence, it is important to understand the nuances of this major coaching category.

Researchers have identified effective pedagogical methods during training by systematically observing highly successful coaches in a variety of settings, including university team sports (Becker & Wrisberg, 2008; Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). The list includes legendary American college basketball coaches John Wooden (Tharp & Gallimore, 1976), Jerry Tarkanian (Bloom et al., 1999), and Pat Summit (Becker & Wrisberg 2008). Their findings revealed that about half of coach behaviours during practices were *instructional* which occurred more frequently than all other types of training behaviour. They also kept their behaviours positive by using praise and avoiding verbal or nonverbal punishment.

Effective coaches must also adjust their training based on the specific needs and preferences of their athletes in order to maximize their learning and performance (Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007). For example, Côté and colleagues (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Côté et al., 2007) noted that coaching objectives differed depending on the athletes' level of development and competitive level. Specifically, unlike participation-based athletes who preferred less emphasis on competition, performance-based athletes such as intercollegiate level athletes had a

desire to compete at a high level. Therefore, they preferred coaches to have a structured training regimen to teach them sport-specific skills. Consistent with this idea, highly successful intercollegiate coaches spend a significant amount of time planning and preparing training sessions, and use frequent instruction behaviours to teach sport-specific skills (Becker & Wrisberg, 2008; Bloom et al., 1999; Vallée & Bloom, 2005).

In short, training is an opportunity for university coaches to teach their athletes different skills in preparation for competition (Bloom 2002; Côté et al., 1995). Moreover, highly successful intercollegiate coaches primarily engaged in instruction behaviours, kept their behaviours positive, and avoided punishment (Becker & Wrisberg, 2008; Bloom et al., 1999). In sum, coaches must adjust their intervention styles based on their athletes' preferences and/or level of development to maximize their athletes' learning (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Côté et al., 2007).

Competition. The competition component has been referred to as those coaching tasks involved throughout the day of the competition, divided into before, during, and after competition (Bloom, 2002). Typically, team sports such as basketball or soccer involve more complex coaching behaviours before, during, and after the competitions (e.g., team-talks, player substitutions, or timeouts) compared to individual sports such as skiing or gymnastics (Bloom, 2002). Hence, research under the team sport contexts has revealed more information on the coaches' behaviours and roles involved in competition (Bloom 2002; Bloom, Durand-Bush, & Salmela, 1997; Debanne & Fontayne, 2009).

Bloom and colleagues (1997) revealed common competition routines of expert intercollegiate team sport coaches. Using individual interviews with a sample of 21 expert intercollegiate coaches, they found that coaches had individualized routines to prepare their

athletes and themselves for upcoming competitions. For example, the coaches used structured pre-game warm-ups and pep-talks where they focused on helping the athletes achieve stable levels of arousal. They also reviewed important concepts within their game-plans and avoided introducing new tactics to their athletes. To prepare themselves, coaches mostly engaged in mental rehearsal of their games to plan how they would react to possible in-game situations such as poor officiating or player substitution due to injury. These rehearsals were important as they helped coaches to control their emotions and adjust to spontaneous in-game situations (Bloom et al., 1997). Debanne and Fontayne (2009) recently found similar results in an interview study with elite handball coaches. Coaches created detailed game plans based on what the team practiced during training sessions, and briefly communicated the key points of the game plans to their athletes during pre-game talks. Then, they adjusted their pre-established game plans to in-game situations throughout the competition such as poor performance or officiating by communicating to playmakers, making substitutions, and showing confidence in the referees (Debanne & Fontayne, 2009).

It is important to note that expert coaches view competition as an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of their training regimens and to monitor their athletes' development (Côté et al., 1995; Salmela, 1996). For example, expert coaches analyzed the results of the game and designed training regimens to address their teams' weaknesses following the competitive events (Bloom et al., 1997; Salmela, 1996). Coaches viewed competition as a process to move closer to achieving their vision of team success and athlete growth and development (Côté et al., 1995; Duchesne et al., 2011; Salmela, 1996; Vallée & Bloom, 2005).

In sum, competition refers to coaches' roles and tasks that pertain to helping their athletes perform to their optimal levels. Hence, coaches utilize many routines before, during, and after

the competitions to help both the athletes and themselves reach their ideal performance states. Importantly, expert coaches view competition as a setting where they can evaluate and monitor the progress of their athletes and programs, rather than focusing solely on winning. To coaches, competition is a process to achieving their goals, rather than an end in itself.

Coach's personal characteristics. Coach's personal characteristics refer to any variables pertaining to the coaches themselves, such as their thoughts, beliefs, and personal characteristics, which all influence the organization, training, and competition elements of their coaching (Côté et al., 1995). Expectedly, the coaches' personal attributes shape their programs and influence athlete development in many important ways (Becker, 2009, 2012; Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Vallée & Bloom, 2005).

Expert university team sport coaches share many personal characteristics (Bloom, 2002; Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Bloom and Salmela found that most expert team sport coaches had a strong desire to learn and acquire coaching knowledge. They used formal education sessions including clinics and workshops, as well as informal opportunities such as interacting with other coaches and self-reflecting on their own coaching to improve their coaching skills. Furthermore, they had personal approaches to their coaching which included emphasis on hard work and being sensitive to their athletes' personal concerns and growth. Similarly, the coaching literature consistently supports that many expert intercollegiate coaches are highly committed to learning (Gilbert et al., 2006; Vallée & Bloom, 2005), emphasize hard work and hustles during training (Becker & Wrisberg, 2008; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976), and pay attention to their athletes' personal concerns (Bloom 2002; Duchesne et al., 2011).

These personal characteristics of the coach have significant influence on their ability to coach, and subsequently the development of their athletes and overall team performance (Becker,

2012; Gearity & Murray, 2011; Turman, 2003). Becker investigated National Collegiate Athletic Association Division (NCAA) I basketball athletes' perceptions of their new head coach who turned their previous losing record (14-17) to a successful one (22-8) in the following season. Importantly, the athletes attributed the success to the personal assets of their new coach which included working hard, treating all athletes fairly, and making efforts to build personal relationships with them in a caring, respectful manner. These characteristics of the coach, in turn, motivated the athletes to work hard and interact with the coach and their teammates, which subsequently led to better overall team performance. Furthermore, the results suggest that the influence of the coach is critical on less experienced or less competent athletes since the athletes felt that the coach's fair treatment to both starting and non-starting players was essential to the individual players' motivation as well as overall team dynamics. Other research studies have also shown that coaches' lack of commitment, uncaring attitude, favoritism, and unfair treatment can have detrimental effect on athlete motivation, team cohesion, and overall team performance (Gearity & Murray, 2011; Turman, 2003).

Athletes' personal characteristics and level of development. The athletes' personal characteristics and level of development refer to the variables pertaining to athletes' current stage of learning, personal background, and other characteristics that influence interactions with their coach (Côté et al., 1995). Many expert intercollegiate coaches view the athletes' personal characteristics as an important, sometimes even stronger predictor, of the athletes' success than performance excellence in their previous level of athletics (Favor, 2011; Giacobbi, Roper, Whitney, & Butryn, 2002). In fact, Giacobbi and colleagues found that college coaches viewed athletes' psychological qualities including commitment and responsibility as important predictors in making successful transitions from high school to college athletics.

One important construct that make up an athlete's personality is "coachability" (Giacobbi et al., 2002; Solomon, 2010; Solomon & Rhea, 2008). Coachability is a complex construct often described as athletes' receptivity towards coach feedback and instructions (Favor, 2011). Intercollegiate coaches consider coachability an important predictor of athletes' development and success, as coachable athletes tend to be more positive, willing to listen and learn, emotionally mature, and make necessary adjustments in response to coach feedback (Giacobbi et al., 2002; Solomon, 2010; Solomon & Rhea, 2008). Furthermore, coachability may be particularly relevant to team sport settings because it influences interactions between the coach, the athletes, and the team. Team sport coaches understand that an uncoachable athlete can damage overall team dynamics by spreading negative attitudes in the team environment (Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2010; Favor, 2011). As a result, successful intercollegiate team sport coaches evaluate and recruit athletes based on their coachability and compatibility to their programs rather than their talent alone (Duchesne et al., 2011; Favor, 2011; Solomon, 2010; Vallée & Bloom, 2005).

Contextual factors. Contextual factors are outside the control of coaches and have a direct effect on their ability to coach their teams (Bloom, 2002; Côté et al., 1995). For example, Canadian intercollegiate coaches and athletes face different types of challenges compared to the American sporting context such as less funding and revenue production (Davies, Bloom, & Salmela, 2005; Geiger, 2013). Similarly, compared to youth or Olympic coaches, intercollegiate coaches must acknowledge that their athletes are under high levels of academic demands (Duchesne et al., 2011; Heller, Bloom, Neil, & Salmela, 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2002).

Intercollegiate athletics involves not only athletic demands, but also educational demands of the athletes (Duchesne et al., 2011; Heller et al., 2005). Intercollegiate athletes typically experience stress from balancing a high volume of work in academics, as well as frequent,

intense training sessions (Duchesne et al., 2011; Heller et al., 2005; Kennedy, Tamminen, & Holt, 2013). Moreover, this challenge may be exacerbated for first-year student-athletes who are facing most of these challenges for the first time (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Tracey & Corlett, 1995). Importantly, these first-year athletes coped with the stress from high academic and athletic demands by using humour and having fun during training, as well as relying on social support from coaches and teammates (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Hence, it is important for intercollegiate coaches to provide adequate levels of social support for athletes and create a positive learning environment where the athletes can positively interact with their teammates and enjoy their training sessions rather than solely focusing on winning.

In addition, the culture of Canadian intercollegiate athletics is fundamentally different from its American counterpart (Davies et al., 2005; Geiger, 2013; Miller & Kerr, 2002). For example, the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) involves little media coverage and attendance at games, and provides less resources and funding to coaches and athletes (Geiger, 2013). Subsequently, the financial resources and administrative duties are often a source of job dissatisfaction for some coaches (Davies et al., 2005). For athletes, available scholarships and opportunities to continue athletic careers post-college are rare (Davies et al., 2005; Geiger, 2013). Aligned with this, many intercollegiate athletes gradually shift their focus from athletics to academic and personal achievements as they approach graduation and prepare for life after retirement from athletics (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Lally, 2007). Similarly, Paule-Koba and Farr (2013) found that former NCAA athletes who made successful transition to careers outside athletics highly valued life lessons and skills such as communication, work ethic, and time management that they learned during their collegiate athletics. Hence, it becomes important that Canadian intercollegiate coaches focus not only on the athletic performance, but also on the

academic and general life skills development of their athletes to prepare for life beyond collegiate athletics. In fact, many successful Canadian intercollegiate coaches aim to teach life skills and values, emphasize the importance of academics, and provide social and personal support to help their athletes succeed both on and off the courts (Duchesne et al., 2011; Rathwell, Bloom, & Loughhead, 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2005).

Leadership

Strong and effective leadership skills can help produce successful team or group performance. Thus, researchers have historically examined the internal compositions of effective leadership. Multiple lines of research led to the development of numerous theoretical frameworks of leadership, which includes the multidimensional model of leadership (MML; Chelladurai, 1993). This section will begin by discussing the history of leadership research, followed by a detailed description of the MML, including the research studies that emanated from it.

Non-sport research. The presence of a leader, who can effectively organize group tasks and coordinate complex interactions, is viewed as a critical component of group or team success (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Lewin and colleagues (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Lippitt & White, 1943) were among the first group of researchers to study the topic of leadership in their examination of autocratic and democratic leadership styles. In a series of experiments, they assigned groups of 10-year-old boys to each type of leader who supervised group activities that ranged from soap carving to model airplane construction. Autocratic leaders dictated and assigned tasks to the boys, whereas democratic leaders encouraged the boys to make their own decisions through group discussions. The results showed that the boys led by autocratic leaders

exhibited the lowest levels of satisfaction and greatest levels of frustration (Lewin et al., 1939; Lippitt & White, 1943).

Other early leadership researchers were interested in distinguishing effective leaders from non-leaders. For example, the trait perspective of leadership was investigated by observing leaders and their peers (e.g., Drake, 1944; Gordon, 1952; Middleton, 1941; Parten, 1933; Partridge, 1935), as well as individuals in business settings who held executive positions (e.g., Starch, 1943; O'Connor, 1934). Among the results, it was found that effective leaders tended to be more intelligent, self-confident, cooperative with people, and responsible compared to their non-leader counterparts. These results suggest that people who are generally intelligent, confident, and sociable are more reliable and capable of coordinating interpersonal relationships and group tasks within organizations.

Despite finding some common characteristics of effective leaders, the trait perspective of leadership has been largely criticized by scholars who recognized that leadership depended heavily on displaying behaviours, rather than merely possessing certain characteristics (Jenkins, 1947; Stogdill, 1948). Researchers began studying the behaviours of effective leaders and isolated two major types of behaviours that leaders engaged in: person-oriented behaviours and task-oriented behaviours (Halpin & Winer, 1957; Korman, 1966; Lowin, Hrapchak, Kavanagh, 1969). Person-oriented behaviours included encouraging participation from subordinates, building mutual trust, and communicating with the subordinates, whereas task-oriented behaviours included defining individual roles, clarifying performance standards, and directing group tasks to accomplish goals. For example, Hemphill (1955) asked college department heads, faculty members, and other departmental members to nominate some well-organized college departments across campus in order to assess the behaviours of the chairperson of each

department. Among the results, the departments that were nominated as well-organized tended to have a chairperson who not only applied well-defined group principles or procedures for tasks, but also communicated and shared friendly relationships with their subordinates. Their results suggested that leaders not only organize and simplify group tasks by providing clear instructions, but also remain sensitive to individual members' needs and open to the members' voice in their decision-making.

Other lines of research noted that the effectiveness of leader behaviours depended on contextual elements outside the leaders such as the types of tasks or organizational structures (Evans, 1970; Hemphill, 1950; House, 1971; Osborn & Hunt, 1975; Yukl, 1971). For example, House investigated employees in an equipment manufacturing company and found that when the job tasks were ambiguous to the employees, the supervisors' provision of detailed guidelines and instructions was significantly linked to greater employee satisfaction level. Importantly, supervisors' guidelines and instructions for easily understandable tasks were not related to the employee satisfaction level. Hence, leaders may need to provide more guidance and demonstrations for novel tasks, and/or for new team members who perceive their job tasks as ambiguous and difficult. Regarding organizational structures, Hemphill found that college students perceived leaders, who supervised 30 or more members, brought more strict rules and disciplines to their groups compared to leaders supervising less than 30 members. Similarly, Osborn and Hunt examined how the number of group members influenced leadership effectiveness under undergraduate student associations. Each association had a president, who supervised 10 to 60 subordinate members. Their results illustrated that under organizations with a greater number of members, the members were more satisfied when their president paid less attention to the individual members. This pattern of results suggests that as the group size

becomes larger, the group tasks and social interactions become increasingly complex. Hence, leaders in larger groups need to provide more strict guidelines and principles to bring together large numbers of people rather than paying attention to individual needs.

Presently, leadership remains one of the most discussed and researched areas in management and organizational psychology (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). Recent research studies investigated factors pertaining to the organization and its members, as well as how these factors influence effectiveness of leadership (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001; Lambert, Tepper, Carr, Holt, & Barelka, 2012; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). For example, Ehrhart and Klein (2001) found that college students' personal values influenced their preferences of supervisor behaviours. Specifically, those students who personally valued interpersonal relationships in their job preferred friendly supervisors who were sensitive to their personal concerns, whereas those who valued order and stability in their work preferred supervisors who set performance goals and coordinated job-related tasks. Similarly, Lambert et al. investigated how subordinates' preferences of the amount of supervisory behaviours influenced leadership effectiveness. Specifically, a sample of full-time employees reported that they were less satisfied and committed to their job when the amount of supervisors' instructions and directions for job-related tasks were either deficient or exceeding the amount that they preferred. These results suggest that leaders must assess each subordinate and provide the types and amount of behaviours that match their subordinates' preferences. Further, organizational structures influence leadership effectiveness (Green, Anderson, & Shivers, 1996; Vaccaro, Janse, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2012). Green and colleagues illustrated that public library employees were less satisfied with their supervisor when they were working with greater numbers of co-workers. Vaccaro and colleagues asked business executives about the influence of their CEOs, who were

their superiors. These business executives viewed CEOs' behaviours as more influential in companies with greater number of employees. These results suggest that greater number of members within an organization may complicate group tasks and interactions, and thus require leaders to provide more guidance and support to simplify tasks and facilitate group interactions. Collectively, the aforementioned studies illustrate that effective leaders display behaviours that match their subordinates' preferences, as well as the situational conditions within their organizations.

Sport leadership and the multidimensional model of leadership. Coach leadership has been linked to successful individual and team performance (Riemer & Harenberg, 2014; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2010), and has been one of the most researched areas within sport (Rangeon, Gilbert, & Bruner, 2012). In particular, sport leadership research has benefited from the work of Chelladurai (1984, 1993, 2007), and specifically the multidimensional model of leadership (MML; Appendix B). The MML provides a theoretical basis for research that investigates how factors pertaining to the coaches, athletes, and situations influence coach leadership. Research based on the MML has provided valuable and practical knowledge for coaches, suggesting they must consider factors such as the gender and experience levels of their athletes, as well as the goals specific to their organization (e.g., professional vs. intercollegiate athletics) in their coaching practices. In sum, coaches can effectively bring together a group of athletes to achieve a common purpose when they are able to carefully assess these factors and adjust their behaviours accordingly.

The MML organizes the integral components of coach leadership into three categories: the antecedents, coach behaviours, and subsequent outcomes. The outcomes are typically represented by *athlete satisfaction* and *individual or team performance*. Coaches are viewed as

effective leaders when they develop their athletes and teams to perform successfully, and when their athletes are satisfied with their behaviours. The coach behaviours are divided into three states: *required*, *preferred*, and *actual behaviors*. *Required behaviors* are represented by how coaches should behave in response to the situational constraints, whereas *preferred behaviors* are the behaviours favoured personally by his/her athletes. *Actual behaviors* are represented by the behaviours that coaches display to their athletes. These three states of coach behaviours are largely a function of the antecedents, which are the characteristics specific to the *coach*, *athletes*, and *situations* that influence coach effectiveness. For example, a sociable coach (i.e., *coach characteristic*) may display *actual behaviors* such as showing friendly attitudes, and athletes who lack experience (i.e., *athlete characteristic*) may prefer more guidance from their coach. Furthermore, coaching university athletes (i.e., *situational characteristic*) may require the coach to pay attention to their educational demands, as well as their athletic demands. The MML proposes that coaches should carefully assess the *athlete characteristics*, the *situational characteristics*, and their own *coach characteristics* in order to align their *actual behaviors* to the *preferred* and *required behaviors*. When this alignment is achieved, the most optimal levels of the *member satisfaction* and *individual or team performance* occur.

The MML has served as a conceptual model for research that investigated coach leadership in intercollegiate team sports (e.g., Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004; Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, & Carron, 2005; Garland & Barry, 1990; Gomes, Lopes, & Mata, 2011; Horn, Bloom, Berglund, & Packard, 2011; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995; Yalcin, 2013). Garland and Barry investigated differences between starting players who played more than 50% of the season and non-starters who played less than 50% of the season in the context of collegiate football. The MML provided a theoretical basis for this study as they were interested whether the athletes'

personality characteristics and perception of coach behaviours differentially predicted their playing time. Among their results, regular starters with high performance levels tended to be more extroverted, emotionally stable, tough-minded, and group-dependent. They also perceived their coach to display more rewarding and instruction behaviours. In another study, Riemer and Chelladurai investigated NCAA I football players' preferred, perceived, and satisfaction with coach behaviours. The researchers argued that playing offensive line in football would be a more predictable task with predetermined steps, whereas playing defensive line would be an unpredictable task where players need to react to the opponents' offensive plays. The results showed that the defensive players preferred more autocratic coach behaviours compared to the offensive players. They concluded that, in comparison to predictable tasks, unpredictable tasks that tend to be ambiguous require coaches to set firm guidelines and procedures. These studies suggested that university coaches should differentiate their behaviours depending on individual athletes' personality and the types of tasks these athletes need to deal with. Specifically, university coaches need to provide more guidance for athletes who are introverted and emotionally unstable, and bring more strict and detailed guidelines for open, interdependent tasks that tend to be more unpredictable. The following sections will discuss the two aspects of the MML that are relevant to the current study: athlete characteristics and preferred coaching behavior and situational characteristics and required coaching behavior. The other component of the model, coach characteristics and actual behaviors, have been discussed in detail in the section under the CM (See page 14).

Athletes' characteristics and preferred behavior. One important athlete characteristic that affects coach behaviour preferences is gender, and research based on MML has revealed that males and females often prefer different coaching behaviours (Beam et al., 2004; Riemer & Toon,

2001; Terry, 1984; Thon et al., 2012). For example, Beam and colleagues investigated NCAA I and II athletes' preferences of coach behaviours. Among their results, male athletes preferred autocratic coaches who dictated group decisions and goals independently of athletes' opinions more than females did, whereas female athletes preferred their coaches to adjust goals and procedures based on their athletic ability or personal needs more than males. Similarly, Riemer and Toon studied NCAA athletes and found that males preferred more autocratic behaviours than females, whereas females preferred more positive feedback from their coaches than males. Also, a recent study by Thon and colleagues investigated highly competitive adult swimmers who qualified for the finals in a provincial-level tournament in Brazil. Among their results, males preferred more autocratic behaviours compared to females. Collectively, these studies suggest that coaches should remain relatively autocratic and dictate group decisions with male athletes, whereas they should focus more on rewarding successful performance and adjusting group decisions based on athletes' personal needs and abilities with female athletes.

Another line of research investigated the maturity and/or competitive levels of the athletes (Chelladurai & Carron, 1983; Riemer & Toon, 2001; Terry, 1984). Chelladurai and Carron studied how high school and university level athletes differed in their preferred coaching behaviours. Accordingly, university athletes preferred more social support from their coaches. The authors explained that university athletes may spend more time and effort in their athletic involvement and hence lack opportunities for social interactions outside athletics. Thus, they may rely on social support from their coaches to fulfill their social needs. Similarly, Terry showed that elite athletes, compared to club athletes, preferred more social support behaviours and less performance-related positive feedback from their coaches, while Riemer and Toon showed that NCAA I athletes preferred less positive feedback from their coaches compared to

NCAA II athletes. Collectively, research revealed that as athletes matured and improved their athletic skills, their preferences of social support from coaches increased and their preferences of positive feedback from coaches decreased. These results suggest that more mature and competent athletes possess high levels of sport-related skills and hence prefer less performance feedback from their coaches. Instead, they prefer more social support from their coaches to fulfill the social needs that they lack outside athletics due to their high levels of time commitment to the athletics. Hence, coaches need to provide social support for more mature and competent athletes rather than performance-related feedback.

Situational characteristics and required behavior. Sport type is a situational characteristic that influences coaching. Research has revealed that coaching team sports such as soccer and basketball required different coaching behaviours compared to independent sports such as gymnastics or track and field (Beam et al., 2004; Chelladurai, 1984; Heydarinejad & Adman, 2010; Ramzaninezhad & Keshtan, 2009; Terry, 1984; Terry & Howe, 1984). For example, Chelladurai investigated athletes' preferences and perceptions of coaches' behaviours in three different types of sports: basketball, wrestling, and track and field. Among their results, basketball players were satisfied when their coach provided positive feedback more so than track and field athletes. This was attributed to the interdependent, complex nature of basketball that limited the athletes' opportunities to self-evaluate their individual performance. Therefore, it was explained that basketball athletes relied on their coaches to provide feedback on their performance, whereas track and field athletes did not. Also, a study by Ramzaninezhad and Keshtan compared coach behaviours among Iranian professional football teams based on their ranking in the league. In comparison to the teams ranked lower, the teams ranked higher showed greater levels of team cohesion, and had coaches who provided more positive feedback for

successful performance and built caring interpersonal relationships with the athletes. Similarly, Heydarinejad and Adman found that university football athletes reported higher levels of team cohesion when their coaches remained friendly, communicated with athletes, and showed concerns for individual athletes' personal concerns. Taken together, research suggests that producing successful performance in team sports requires coaches to provide constant positive feedback regarding successful performance, and personally interact and communicate with the athletes to build cohesive teams.

Further, team sports typically require athletes to carry out multiple roles within the team (Eys, Schinke, & Jeffery, 2007). Subsequently, team sport athletes often experience role ambiguity, where they do not have a clear understanding of what their expectations are and how they should behave on their team (Eys & Carron, 2001). Eys and colleagues studied the topic of role ambiguity in team sports, and found that athletes with high levels of role ambiguity experienced greater anxiety (Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, & Carron, 2003), were less satisfied with their coach (Eys, Carron, Bray, & Beauchamp, 2003), viewed their coaches as less capable (Bosselet, Heuzé, Eys, Fontayne, & Sarrazin, 2012), and damaged team performance (Benson, Eys, Surya, Dawson, & Schneider, 2013). Specifically, several of their studies revealed that the negative outcomes associated with role ambiguity were more exacerbated for less experienced athletes (Beauchamp et al., 2005; Benson et al., 2013; Eys, Carron, Beauchamp, & Bray, 2003). For example, among Canadian intercollegiate team sport athletes, non-starting players relied on their coaches' instructions to clarify their roles, whereas starting players did not require coaches' support in clarifying their roles (Beauchamp et al., 2005). Similarly, it was shown that first-year university soccer athletes experienced higher role ambiguity in the beginning of the season compared to their veteran counterparts who had been on the team for more than two years (Eys,

Carron, Beauchamp, et al., 2003). Further, in a recent study by Benson and colleagues, intercollegiate athletes viewed role ambiguity as an important reason for first-year athletes to leave the team after their first year experience. Collectively, these studies illustrated that team sport athletes, especially those who are less experienced such as first-year athletes, often lack a clear understanding of their roles within their teams. Subsequently, these athletes are more likely to experience negative outcomes including anxiety, lower satisfaction levels, poor performance, and dropouts. As such, intercollegiate team sport coaches may need to provide more feedback and clear instructions for less experienced athletes to clarify what their roles and expectations are within their teams to develop and retain them through the years.

Chapter 3

Methods

This chapter will discuss the qualitative methodology that was employed in the current study. It will begin with a description of the participant criteria and the recruitment procedures. Following this, the data collection processes, including the interview, will be explained. The final section will outline the data analysis procedures and the methods to ensure the trustworthiness of the current study.

Participants

According to Côté and Gilbert (2009), an effective coach is an individual who possesses knowledge that is specific to their particular coaching environment(s), and uses this knowledge to develop their athletes consistently over an extended period of time. Similarly, Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Römer (1993) have also found that acquiring an expertise status required an individual to gain experience in their particular domain for a minimum of 10 years. The eight current participants averaged approximately 20 years of CIS head coaching experience that ranged between 10 to 40 years. Seven out of eight coaches spent their entire university coaching career at their current institutions, while one coach has worked at two different universities. Further, they received numerous honours and awards, including 27 coach of the year awards at the regional, provincial, and national levels. Given the longevity of the participants' coaching careers and distinguished achievements, it was believed that these coaches met the descriptions of an effective coach provided by Côté and Gilbert (2009), in addition to exceeding the 10-year requirement of an expert provided by Ericsson and colleagues (1993). Furthermore, both Côté and Gilbert and Ericsson et al. noted that an expert status is context specific, which in this case included coaching the team sports of men's basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey. These three

sports were specifically chosen as they share similar athletic characteristics, such as schedules (i.e., full-season from September to March) and roster sizes (e.g., between 15-30 players). Additionally, the coaches were purposefully recruited from a wide variety of universities that represented all three major categories of academic institutions in Canada, according to the MacLean's university rankings (i.e. Medical Doctoral, Comprehensive, and Primarily Undergraduate; Dwyer, 2014). The MacLean's rankings take into account a number of factors including competence of student and faculty, student population size, resources available, and breadth and depth of undergraduate and graduate programs. Taken together, the eight coaches who were recruited for the current study represented a wide variety of Canadian universities that required them to commit to their student-athletes' academic and athletic success, and had extensive coaching experience and knowledge in their coaching environments, evidenced by the longevity of their careers and distinguished achievements.

Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the study, ethical approval was received from the McGill Research Ethics Board. Following this, the researcher created a list of nine potential candidates who met the participant selection criteria through an internet search with the guidance of the thesis supervisor who had substantial experience and knowledge in CIS coaching research. The researcher emailed each participant a recruitment letter (see Appendix C) to ask whether they would be interested in participating in the study. Of the nine candidates, eight agreed to participate and one refused. Once each participant agreed to participate, the researcher and the participant decided on a date, time, and place of convenience for the interview. The researcher traveled to each of the participant's academic affiliations located in various cities in Ontario and Québec to conduct the interviews face-to-face. More specifically, seven of eight interviews took

place in private office settings, and one took place in a quiet cafeteria located in the athletic complex at the participant's academic institution. Before each interview began, the researcher asked each coach to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix D).

Data Collection

The researcher conducted individual interviews with each participant. Interviewing is a purposeful conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Waldron, 2012), and is the most common method of inquiry in qualitative research within sport and exercise psychology (Culver, Gilbert, & Trudel, 2003; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The current study used in-depth interviews, in a semi-structured format. In-depth interviews aim to gather deeper information and knowledge of a complex phenomenon, including interviewee's lived experiences and perspectives (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer some degree of control over the interview and keep it focused on the topic, while letting the interviewee openly discuss their experiences and perspectives without many restrictions and elaborate on any ideas that they consider important (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The interviewer probed some responses for details and examples to gather in-depth information. The researcher showed interest in the participants' answers by demonstrating positive body language, which helped to create an environment that allowed the interviewees to share their perceptions and experiences in detail. All interviews were audio-recorded.

A three section interview guide (see Appendix E) was created. The first section contained opening questions that asked the interviewee to briefly comment on their career development as an athlete and as a coach. These questions also introduced the topic of the study and initiated and guided the discussion into the next section. To ensure that the coaches' discussions focused on the students who entered university for the first time, the interviewer emphasized that the

discussion should focus only on athletes transitioning from high school to university, and should exclude students transitioning from Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEP) to university since these individuals tend to be older and may have already moved away from home and may be less susceptible to the academic and athletic stressors that accompany younger student-athletes transitioning directly from high school. The second section contains the key questions to gather information directly related to the purpose of the study. The key questions were created based on the coaching model (CM; Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995), the multidimensional model of leadership (MML; Chelledurai, 1993), and related coaching literature. Specifically, the key questions explored the coaches' knowledge regarding their first-year student-athletes, and how their behaviours and strategies differed between coaching first-year student-athletes and more experienced athletes (e.g., "What are some common characteristics of first-year student-athletes?", "How does coaching first-year student-athletes differ from coaching more senior, experienced athletes?"). Lastly, the third section concluded the interview, and gave an opportunity for the interviewee to give any questions or comments. The interviews were concluded by thanking the interviewee for their time and effort.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by using thematic analysis, where the researcher searches for and organizes patterns in unstructured data to build a system of themes or ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2006) specified that thematic analysis is not grounded in certain theoretical assumptions, and thus advised researchers who are using thematic analysis to state their philosophical assumptions and theoretical lens. The current study utilized a social constructivist approach that seeks to understand the participants' views and interpretations of their experiences within their particular contexts, rather than trying to find a universal 'truth' that

is independent of human interpretations and social meanings (Creswell, 2013). Similarly, other research studies have used this approach to understand complex phenomenon embedded in the social contexts of sport such as athletes' accounts of eating disorders (Busanich & McGannon, 2010) and emotions during athletic performance (Locke, 2003). The current study was interested in the participants' views of coaching first-year athletes in their specific context of Canadian university sport, and assumed that their knowledge and perspectives were co-created with daily social interactions within their settings. In conducting thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) described six distinct steps: *immersion*, *generating initial codes*, *searching for and identifying themes*, *reviewing themes*, *defining and naming themes*, and *writing the report* (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The subsequent sections will describe each step in detail.

Immersion. Immersion refers to the researcher familiarizing oneself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Immersion was achieved by the researcher conducting all eight interviews himself, as well as listening to the audio-recordings of the interviews. Further, the researcher transcribed all eight interviews verbatim, making only minor necessary changes that included correcting grammatical errors and deleting coaches' names or affiliations to protect their confidentiality. Finally, the researcher re-read the transcribed scripts several times. As a result, the researcher had a good grasp of the nuances of the discussions that occurred during the interviews prior to the coding processes.

Generating initial codes. Once the researcher immersed himself with the interview data, the coding processes began. Coding is defined as the “process of identifying aspects of the data that relate to your research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2013. pp. 206). The researcher first divided the interview data into chunks of texts. Each chunk of data can be either a large (e.g., 20 lines of data) or small (e.g., a single sentence) extract of data that can potentially answer the

research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For the current study, a Microsoft Word document was used to organize the data extracts. Once all interview data was divided into smaller data extracts, a code that thoroughly and concisely summarized the content of each data extract was assigned using the “comment” feature of the Word document. An Excel file was created to list and organize all the codes that were assigned to the data.

Searching for and identifying themes. In this stage, the researchers examined the data extracts and their assigned codes in detail to search for potential patterns and create candidate themes. A theme is defined as a “central organising concept” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 224) that contains and organizes a number of codes into a broader and general idea, much like a wall (i.e., theme) that is created by assembling individual bricks (i.e., codes). This stage resulted in generating seven initial candidate themes: *career progression*, *coaching style*, *team environment*, *athlete – athletics*, *athlete – academics*, *athlete – personal life*, and *coach-athlete relationship*.

Reviewing themes. This step involved ensuring that each theme worked well with all of the codes and the coded data extracts. Specifically, the researcher re-read the coded data extracts to ensure that each theme was consistent with what the extracts represented. If discrepancies between the themes and the coded data extracts were found, either the theme was adjusted to entail a broader idea or the data extract was given a different code to establish a match between the theme and the data extract. This adjustment process was repeated until all themes matched well with all codes and the coded data extracts. The process of reviewing themes resulted in a few changes in some of the themes. First, team environment was changed to *supportive atmosphere*. Second, coach-athlete relationship was discarded. Finally, a new theme was identified: *personal makeup of first-year athlete*.

Defining and naming themes. In this stage, the researcher aimed to refine and define the themes, as well as identify the main message of each theme. Also, the researcher examined the themes to decide whether sub-themes or over-arching themes should be created. As a result, *athlete – athletics*, *athlete – academics*, and *athlete – personal life* were combined as sub-themes to create a new theme: *development of first-year athlete*. Thus, there were five finalized themes: career progression, coaching style, supportive atmosphere, personal makeup of first-year athlete, and development of first-year athlete with its three sub-themes (see Figure 1).

Writing the report. In thematic analysis, writing provides a final opportunity for the researcher to organize and refine the themes, and thus is considered as an active process of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In this stage, researcher's purpose was to provide detailed descriptions and vivid examples of each theme, as well as deeper interpretations of what each theme entails. Following the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013), the researcher aimed to tell a coherent and interesting story that represented the themes, convinced the reader that the data analysis procedures were valid, and answered the research questions.

Trustworthiness

The current study addressed three criteria to enhance the trustworthiness of the research: credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Credibility is enhanced when the research findings accurately reflect the participants' perspectives and opinions, while confirmability is enhanced when the research findings are not a product of researcher bias or "rampant subjectivity" (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, pp. 181). Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be generalized to other settings (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Specifically, three techniques were used to enhance each criterion to enhance the trustworthiness of this study: (a) pilot interviews, (b) thick description, and (c) peer debriefing. First, two *pilot interviews* were conducted to enhance credibility and confirmability. Pilot testing can be used to “refine and develop research instruments, assess the degrees of observer bias . . . and adapt research procedures” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 165). The first pilot interviewee was a head coach of a CIS team and the second interviewee was an assistant coach of another CIS team. Both interviewees had years of experience as an athlete and as assistant coaches in the CIS. Based on their comments during and following the interview, the interview questions were edited to ensure that they were the appropriate length, clear and easily understandable, and relevant to the purpose of the study and to the context of the CIS team sport. Data gathered from the pilot interviews were not included in the analysis. Second, *thick description* was used to enhance the transferability of the findings (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This involves the researcher providing detailed descriptions of the contexts of the findings, so that the readers are able to judge whether the research findings are generalizable to their own contexts. As such, the results section provided quotes from the participants that vividly exemplified the research findings and the contexts where the participants’ discussions were embedded in. Third, *peer debriefing* was used to enhance the credibility and confirmability of the findings (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This process involved asking a peer uninvolved in the study to examine the coding processes and suggest alternative interpretations of the data, which helped assess the principal investigator’s bias during data analysis.

Personal reflexivity involves the researcher critically reflecting on how his/her own views, ideas, and roles influence the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The principal investigator of the current research study had been a member of a varsity badminton team during

his first year as an undergraduate student at a Canadian university. He experienced difficulties with balancing heavy academic and athletic demands, adjusting to a higher-level university sport, as well as building new social networks in the university environments in his first year. These personal experiences have led him to develop an interest in a research topic that seeks to investigate experienced coaches' perceptions on coaching and helping first-year student-athletes who may be struggling with their transitions from high school. Acknowledging his own experiences and views, the principal investigator used open-ended interview questions that let the participants freely discuss topics they felt to be the most relevant. Further, he used elaboration and clarification probes (e.g., "Can you tell me more about that?" "What do you mean by that?") to clarify any ambiguity and accurately represent the participants' views, rather than imposing his own interpretations.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter will present the results from the individual interviews conducted with the participants. Specifically, the eight interviews lasted a total of 647 minutes. The length of the interviews ranged from 61 to 101 minutes, with an average of 81 minutes. The varying length of interviews was an expected feature because the semi-structured interview style and open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to speak freely about their experiences with few restrictions. As such, some coaches may have spent more time elaborating on certain topics, while others may have spoken in a more concise manner. Transcribing the interviews verbatim generated 103 pages and 69,045 words of text. Following the analysis, five themes were identified: *career progression*, *coaching style*, *personal makeup of first-year athlete*, *supportive atmosphere*, and *development of first-year athlete*. Further, development of first-year athlete included three sub-themes that were called *athletics*, *academics*, and *personal life*. Figure 1 provides a visual depiction of all the themes and sub-themes. The following sections will provide descriptions of each of the five themes, including quotes from coaches that will help exemplify the central tenets of each theme. Quotes from the eight coaches are provided below and are listed as C1 to C8.

Career Progression

This theme describes coaches' experiences as an athlete and as a coach up to and including their current position. Coaches' athletic experiences addressed their early involvement in sports, as well as their competitive sporting backgrounds. Coaches started to play sports in early life, ranging from 5 years old to high school. During this time, three coaches (C1, C3, C6) played more than one sport, two coaches focused on one sport (C4, C5), and the remaining three

did not mention how many sports they were involved in early life (C2, C7, C8). Later in their lives, seven out of eight coaches (C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C7, C8) were specialized in a single sport during university, with two of these coaches (C4, C8) also playing junior hockey prior to university. There was one exception of a volleyball coach (C6) who played varsity volleyball and junior varsity basketball during university. Of interest, all eight coaches competed at the university level as an athlete in the same sport they now coach. Coaches also discussed their experiences as a first-year university athlete. Most coaches mentioned challenges which ranged from balancing high demands of academics and athletics, to injuries, to increasing effort level, to accepting a lower-status role in their teams, and to replacing a role of a senior athlete who dropped out unexpectedly. Only one coach said that the first-year experience was not particularly stressful. In addition to playing at the university level, two of the eight participants had professional athletic careers. One coach played in Europe for several months following the university career, and another coach played semi-professionally for several years, as well as for the senior national team for two years. Among the six coaches that did not have professional athletic careers, four of them went into coaching (C2, C3, C4, C7), and two of them went to graduate school prior to coaching (C6, C8).

For most participants, coaching was a natural transition from their athletic involvement. Coaches took different pathways to their current coaching positions. Five out of eight coaches started as an assistant coach at a university level ranging from one to five years (C1, C3, C5, C6, and C8). Following this, two of these five coaches became a university head coach (C3, C6), one coach (C1) worked as a head coach at a college level for a few years before becoming a university head coach, and two coaches (C5, C8) coached professional teams as a head coach for several years before accepting a university head coaching job. Among the other three coaches

that did not start as an assistant coach, one (C2) started and coached their own club for a few years, one (C6) worked as a head coach at the high school and the *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* (CEGEP) level for more than 15 years, and one (C4) worked as a coach at junior and CEGEP level teams and also had a professional career in the financial sector prior to their current university head coaching positions. As a university head coach, seven of eight coaches (C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8) have remained at their current positions for their entire careers, while one coach (C1) spent more than 10 years at a different university prior to the current position. The average number of years as a CIS head coach was about 20 years among the coaches.

Coaches built their profiles and developed their knowledge and skills by using a number of different sources of information. All eight coaches valued learning from self-reflecting on their own experiences. Many coaches also mentioned learning from other coaches, conferences, and written resources, such as books. Particularly, two coaches (C1, C7) discussed the substantial influence from their mentors, whom they met during their involvement in the national team as an assistant coach. Further, coaches emphasized that many years of coaching experiences helped them mature as coaches, which significantly influenced and shaped their current coaching styles.

Coaching Style

This theme relates to their athlete-centered coaching style. This means they cared for their athletes at a personal level whether they were a first-year or a fifth-year athlete. Particularly, four of the coaches mentioned that coaching is similar to parenting:

It's like being a parent. . . . There are times when you got to be really tough with your kids so they understand, and there are times when you got to give them all kinds of hugs and love so they can figure it out. (C1)

I hate to use this word but a lot of it is parenting skills. As a coach you become a surrogate parent for a lot of these kids. You treat them as your family because you care about them as family. Sometimes you've got to be that parent and have that influence on them too. (C4)

Further, all eight coaches aimed to develop their athletes in all aspects of life that focused on their academic, athletic, and personal achievements. The coaches' ultimate goal was to help their athletes succeed in life after university, so this philosophy continued throughout their athletes' entire university experience:

I've done my job when these guys come in as freshmen and they leave as seniors. You can see the development of them as young men. They are going to go out there and be functional and successful in society. . . . Wins and losses are nice, but watching these young guys grow up to be young successful men is much more rewarding. (C1)

This is the most rewarding thing for me. Seeing them succeed, move on with professional careers, being good husbands, boyfriends . . . confident people, that's the biggest thing. Not afraid of adversities and challenges and just finding the positives in everything. That's my goal. (C5)

Specific to coaching first-year athletes, coaches heavily emphasized the importance of communicating with and building personal relationships with them. Coaches noted the importance of forging a positive coach-athlete relationship early in the first-year athletes' tenure:

The biggest thing about coaching is relationships. You got to get guys on board in their first-year. If you can make the first-year guys “your guys,” that sets everything up for the rest of their career there. I think that's a big part of it. (C3)

If you don't make that contact with the kid in his first-year, then he will never have that confidence to come to you in years later. That's why it's important that you have that contact with your first-year players on a regular basis. (C4)

You cannot have the player without the person. If you do not show an interest in the person, you are never going to get the player to reach his maximum potential whatever that may be. I strongly believe that. I don't coach players, I coach people. (C8)

Of interest, one coach specifically mentioned that building relationships with the first-year athletes started during the recruiting process, and another coach mentioned that it was an ongoing process without specific starting or end points:

Building relationships is done during the recruiting process. When you are recruiting these young guys you are in constant communication. . . . You try to go watch them play as much as you can, so you are constantly building the relationship and trust with the athlete. . . . When a young man decides where he goes to school and if he is going to play for that coach, he needs to have a relationship with that coach. (C1)

I think [building the relationship with the athletes] starts at the onset and it's just ongoing.

I don't think there is any part of the process that is a starting point or a jumping off point.

I think it's just a constant habit. (C4)

Building relationships with their first-year athletes was enhanced by constant communications.

Specifically, coaches talked about various sport and non-sport issues.

I certainly talk to all the first-year kids every day. Constantly I ask them, "How is everything going? How is school going?" Even in practice I might pull a kid over beside the ice and people think I am explaining a drill to him, but I may just be asking him how things are going. That's the opportunity, that's the connecting part for me. I think that's extremely important. (C4)

I think [first-year athletes] are the guys that you are in constant communications with. Older players know the ropes. Young kids don't know. So you are constantly reaching out to them, "How are things going? How's school?" Asking him questions. Just getting to know where they are at. (C1)

The biggest thing is I will ask them "How are you doing today?" You know? And if they have a problem, an injury or something, I will have a conversation with them regarding that. Quick, 30 seconds, "Did you go see the therapist? Oh good, alright." I don't have to do that with the veterans as I said. But I will take the 30 seconds to address them and say, "How's it going? Did you get your results back?" (C7)

Personal Makeup of First-Year Athlete

This theme relates to the personality characteristics that coaches valued in their first-year athletes. Notably, this theme entails the personal characteristics that coaches looked for when recruiting athletes, as well as the personal characteristics that coaches tried to develop in the first-year athletes.

Specific to recruiting, coaches selected athletes based on a number of criteria that included physical capabilities (e.g., strength, speed), academic achievements, athleticism, sport-specific skills, fit within the current team, and social skills. In addition, coaches spent a

significant amount of time emphasizing the importance of selecting athletes whose personalities they described as positive, persevering, and responsible:

When I am looking for a kid, I like to look at how the young guy deals with adversity.

When things are not going well for them in a game, if he is struggling in a game, how he faces that, how he deals with that. We are looking for young men that are not going to sit around, point fingers, and blame others. A big thing for me is character and how a young man deals with adversity. (C1)

I think it's important to have kids who have struggled. [For] kids who have had everything given to them and been pampered, because like I said your first-year is a struggle, there is going to be times [when you need to deal with struggles]. If you don't know how to deal with struggles and you just quit, then that's what you will do. When push comes to shove, you are leaving. . . . We need guys who are going to fight through things. (C3)

Furthermore, coaches emphasized the importance of selecting athletes with good work ethic:

I always have a spot on the team for one kid who I know is going to bust his tail until everybody has died. A lot of times people have come up to me and said, "Why is that player playing?" I said, "Well, I know that that person is willing to be a role player. I know that that person will never quit working, and I know that that person is the most enthusiastic person on the court. To me, that's more important than all the talent, ability, and athleticism in the world." (C7)

Ones I have enjoyed coaching the most are the ones who come in and who haven't had expectations or thought that they are entitled to play right away. . . . The best teams always have their best players who are the hardest workers and expect the least. They

probably deserve the most but they expect the least. I think that's something I have really come to appreciate. (C3)

Coaches also discussed the ways to assess the personal makeup of the first-year athletes during recruiting and coaching. Specifically, coaches carefully examined their words, actions, gestures, and body language:

Sometimes I see a high school athlete who gets pissed off easily at their setter, or a guy makes mistakes and they are like "Jeez!" and they are walking away from them, rather than going over and saying "Let's get the next one." Those kinds of interactions weigh heavily with me [when recruiting]. (C2)

Little things [are important]. Who sets up the net? Who takes it down? Who is willing to carry the balls? Who looks after their teammates? Picks up garbage off the floor? How quick do they respond to coach saying, "I need someone to do this"? Do they follow instructions? If there is something unpleasant to do, do they complain? All of those kinds of things. (C6)

Kids don't realize their body language is more obvious than what they say, especially for first years and reacting to things. They might not be mad at you but they might be mad at themselves. Like I said one of the things about playing at this level is, you go from offense to defense in split seconds. So if you make a mistake, you don't have time to hang your head. Just say "next play, next play, next play." (C3)

In addition to assessing and selecting right personal characteristics of the first-year athletes, coaches also tried to develop their character. In line with their general coaching style that focuses on developing the athletes as better people, coaches aimed to help their first-year athletes acquire and develop the personal qualities that will help them succeed later in life:

I don't know how it was in your high school, but you can't show up late for practice. It's a selfish act. . . . When a young guy is late, he's not thinking that he is being selfish. He's [thinking,] "I'm just being late, so what? I was late in high school, I got to play and scored 25 points, what's the big deal?" No, when you go on with your real life and you show up for a job late, you are not going to have a job. [It's] teaching the accountability, that you are responsible and accountable to your teammates. If you are late, you are really saying that you don't care about your teammates. They have never looked at it from that approach. Then they go, "I apologize coach, it won't happen again." (C1)

I think teaching all of the accountability is important and that's a challenge because a lot of them haven't been accountable in the past. In the society you finish 12th you get a ribbon, and it was ok. If you were 5 minutes late, that's ok. It's not ok here. It's pretty much a philosophy. (C3)

Particularly, four coaches mentioned that one of the key personal qualities that first-year athletes often lack is confidence. For example, one coach (C2) said, "It is rare that a first-year athlete is good enough, and confident enough, as much as physically good enough, that they can contribute in meaningful games early on." Another coach said:

Kids tend to lose some confidence. These guys have been successful their whole lives and now they are struggling, so they don't know how to struggle, or how to deal with struggles. That's not a basketball thing, that's a mental thing. (C1)

As such, these coaches discussed the importance of building confidence in the first-year athletes, as well as the ways to do so. For example, one coach (C7) said, "That's a big issue, how you give them confidence. You got to build on the good things they are doing." Similarly, other coaches also said:

For me, beside everything, I want to walk them straight. What I mean by that is like confidence with chest up, shoulders relaxed with a "Challenge me, I am ready for you." kind of attitude. That's one of the legacies I want to leave here. (C5)

If you are trying to build confidence, you have to put them in situations where they can be successful. You have to manipulate and figure out, "I'm going to put this guy in the best situation possible where he is going to be successful". (C1)

Supportive Atmosphere

The central tenet of this theme is the coaches' emphasis on creating an optimal team atmosphere for enhancing the experience of the first-year athlete. In order to build an atmosphere that is conducive to their athlete-centered coaching style, coaches set high standards for all athletes regardless of their tenure, but also showed patience with first-year athletes' development. In addition, coaches used senior athletes to help the first-year athletes, and integrated first-year athletes into the team by organizing team bonding activities.

All coaches discussed the importance of creating a team culture where all members were required to meet high standards of excellence in and out of athletic settings. This direction was not limited to upper-year athletes:

Mentally I don't treat first-year athletes any differently. I expect the same from everybody. The kind of effort you give me as a senior athlete and effort you give me as a freshman are exactly the same. (C1)

The standards you are setting for your program [are important]. You outline them, and they are aware of them. One of them for example is the way how we communicate. No swearing. Be professional. I want them to have class. That's what it is. I treat them the same way, from first to second [to more senior athletes]. (C5)

There is none [that I would do differently for first-year athletes during training or practice]. I want performance. I want you to work hard. I don't care if you are a 5th year player or a first-year player or a first-month player. These are the rules here, these are the standards. Either achieve them or get out. Who the heck are you? I got the whistle. (C7)

At the same time, coaches acknowledged the value of patience with their first-year athletes:

When you try to walk in the shoes of the athlete for a bit, the senior athletes probably have a better understanding of what the coaches' expectations are in terms of effort, competitiveness level, and execution of a particular drill, whereas a first-year player hasn't got that time and experience yet. (C8)

For some of first-year athletes it's overwhelming because they are learning so much so quickly. As a coach you need to be patient because they are going to make lots of mistakes. It's a lot of correcting mistakes. You have to be patient. (C1)

Kids are going to make mistakes at this age. This is generalizing and not the case for everybody, [but] the guys often don't grow up till they are 30. . . . There are other things that are priorities. . . . You know, they don't think about consequences. "What do you mean you haven't paid your electric bills for 12 months?" "I have no electricity." "Why? Maybe you shouldn't have bought that new PS4." Those are all the challenges. (C3)

As such, coaches created environments where first-year athletes felt accepted and supported through their developmental phases:

My job is to create an environment in the change room on the team so they feel accepted with their weaknesses. They have to be aware that it is OK to have weaknesses and focus

on their strengths, what they are bringing to the team, the potentials that I see in them, and the kind of system I have to use and methods to make them blossom. (C5)

Four coaches mentioned utilizing team bonding activities to create a supportive environment for their first-year athletes.

I think it's very beneficial [for our first-year athletes] to do our annual camp. After the exams, I am taking the team for a week. . . . We are going there and basically what I am saying is, "This is the time we are spending together." So they have to open up. There are no phones because of cost. They have one week of communicating and opening up. . . . We cover many topics which help them see the bigger picture. . . . Any topic which help me speed up the process of them adopting the team culture, getting to know each other better. . . . There is a lot of quietness in the beginning, and then they start opening up. . . . I have to let them speak out first in a healthy environment. (C5)

Our first-years are integrated into our team right away. As soon as we picked them, we went off to a retreat camp. We did a whole bunch of different things. They were putting groups of four, with a fourth-year, third-year, second-year and a first-year. For our lunch up in that camp, one group had to prepare salads, one group had to prepare sandwiches and meats, and one group had to look after desserts and side dishes. Separate from that, I created four other groups, all with one first-year in each, and they had to write an original song. . . . We had a campfire on the Saturday night, and . . . they performed for each other. The assistant coaches and I had some really nice prizes. (C2)

As much as they supported team building activities, the coaches also denounced any form of hazing, which would occur with first-year athletes. Despite this, they expected first-year athletes

to do minor chores for the team that were not demeaning yet differentiated them from senior athletes:

Our first-years have a tradition. They are the ones that are responsible to set up and take down the nets. They are the ones that are responsible to make sure the water bottles are filled prior to practice, and are brought to the gym for all athletes. There is no hazing but as a freshman this is sort of like a passage. When you are a sophomore, then the expectation is that the freshmen who come in will deal with those things. (C6)

We have a series of duties every day. The water bottles need to be filled, the ice cooler needs ice in it, we need to pick up towels at the equipment counter, and the medical kit needs to come to practice. We need to get the balls out of the bins and into the carts.

Simple stuff that has to be done. The rookies as a group are responsible for that. . . . But it's still team jobs. Everybody has to contribute. If the veterans walk in and the balls are still in the box, the rookies haven't taken care of that yet, then they jump in and take care of it. That's just another one of those things that pulls them together and makes them work together. Some people would call it hazing that they have to do the water bottles and the veterans don't. But everybody is a rookie once, everybody takes their year, takes their turn, it's not demeaning work. . . . Rookie jobs are the things we do daily to prepare for practice. (C2)

Interestingly, one coach did not require first-year athletes to carry out such chores. Rather, this coach divided all work equally to selected team leaders regardless of their tenure:

The one thing that we do differently than a lot of other teams is that we don't have "rookies." We don't say that. A lot of teams there is a rite of passage which means the kids get to do all the dirty jobs in the first year. They've got to clean the bus. They've got

to take the laundry down in the laundry room. They've got to pick it up and bring it back. Here we have leadership groups. We have first-year kids, second-year kids, third-year kids, fourth-year kids, one captain in each group. It's up to the group that gets things done. Each group has different responsibilities on different days. It's not just the first-year players that need to go through that rite of passage. It's just a team thing. We decided last year that we didn't want that rite of passage stuff anymore. Certainly I've lived it as a player. I've lived it as a coach. I've allowed it as a coach. But I don't allow initiations and I don't subscribe to that first-year thing. It's team leaders now. (C4)

In creating a supportive environment, the role of senior athletes and team leaders was critical. Coaches expected their senior athlete leaders to help first-year athletes:

There is probably someone on our team in year four who has gone through exactly what the guy in year one is experiencing. So that's a good thing too for leaning on some of your peer assistance for help, direction, that sort of thing. (C8)

One other thing we have tried to implement is what we call "anchors." . . . What we try to do is say, "Hey, find someone on the team that you respect, you trust, you feel comfortable with. Let them be your anchor. When times are tough, go to your anchor.

Your anchor is there to try and help you, make you better." (C6)

In addition, coaches often deliberately asked senior athletes to communicate with a first-year athlete, or even paired up senior athletes with certain first-year athletes based on common areas of interest:

We try to associate our older guys with our younger guys. They are always there to support them. This weekend [there was] a first-year player who wasn't playing much, who I think has a tremendous potential. I talked to two or three older guys and said,

"Make sure you are talking to this guy." I am talking to him [too] but there is more credibility coming from his teammates who [can say,] "Yes I know how you feel and I've been through that. It's a challenge and you've got to work through it." They got to relate to that. (C3)

Another resource is older, upper-year players who are seniors and juniors. This is the team culture. They communicate with each other. I pair them up based on the academic programs for peer support. . . . It's like inching on each other. (C5)

Sometimes [peer pairing] is informal. Sometimes it's very formal. We often have unilingual players that come and their first language isn't English. We are going to make sure we pair that first-year player up with a veteran player. That's something that I am very hands-on with. (C4)

Development of First-Year Athlete

This theme pertains to a variety of issues that first-year athletes experienced as they were transitioning from high school to university. Coaches spent a large amount of time during the interview discussing their first-year athletes' experiences and the strategies for helping them deal with their various issues related to the athletes' athletic, academic, and personal matters. These ranged from adjusting to the level of university athletics, to filling lower-status roles within their teams, to meeting academic requirements, to managing their time, and to living alone away from family for the first time.

Athletics. This sub-theme relates to a variety of issues the first-year athletes experienced as they were transitioning to a higher-level of competition, as well as how coaches helped them improve their athletic skills and adjust to the university level of competition.

Coaches emphasized how the level of competition for most of their freshmen was unexpectedly higher than they had anticipated. To begin, most first-year athletes lacked the physical capabilities to play at the university level, which restricted them to filling lower-status roles early in their tenure:

High school has a certain speed of the game. When you get up to this level, because university players are stronger and maybe a little bit faster, the first-year athletes' speed level has to adjust. It takes them time, it's just normal. (C7)

When you get recruits you are usually trying to get the best player of their high school team. So they are used to "being the man," as we say. And when you come here, now we are trying to get him to fit into a team concept and you are not going to "be the man," you are not going to get the ball every time, you are not going to shoot the ball every time. (C1)

In fact, some first-year athletes overestimated their abilities and had unrealistic expectations regarding their role on the team:

A lot of kids come in their first year and obviously they don't have the same perspective that the coaches do. They think they know more and they are better than they really are because you don't know what you don't know. They don't see the details that they are missing. They don't understand their deficiencies because they haven't been exposed to that level of competition or coaching before. (C3)

Whether you imagine it or not, every person's role is an important role. If your role as a first-year athlete is to become a complete athlete, learn the system and adjust to the speed, then you have to do that really well, because you can't be a good rookie in third year. You've got to get past that. That's your job in your first year. (C2)

As such, coaches' had to keep their first-year athletes motivated and interested until they were ready to make significant contributions to the team:

You don't want to lose kids after their first year because they think they are not important. That's a big thing. Retention is important. If you are not going to keep kids after their first year, they are never going to turn into 3rd, 4th, or 5th year kids. It's like, "planting a tree and cutting it down before the tree is old enough to produce fruits," kind of a thing. (C3)

You don't want to take away the passion away from that guy. You want to develop a skill set to see that he can get to that next level, not encourage his frustration to quit. That's the difference when you are dealing with a first-year athlete. (C4)

Due to the first-year athletes' lack of skills and experience, coaches mainly focused on developing their technical and tactical skills through practice and training. One coach (C5) said, "We got a system where we spend more time with younger guys, teaching them basic requirements of their positions and what they are going to play." Another coach said:

We spend more time on skill development with our [first-year] athletes to make them better athletes. Hopefully by their 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year, they are ready to contribute more than they are as freshmen. It's very rare that you get freshmen who come in and contribute at a high level. (C1)

Regarding teaching skills and correcting mistakes for first-year athletes, three coaches (C1, C2, C3) mentioned utilizing video:

See for yourself. "How did you handle this situation, was it successful or was it not?"

Videotape is a great teaching tool for us, especially for first-year kids because they

probably didn't do it in high school. Now this is a new approach to teaching and learning, so I think it's valuable for them. (C1)

"You think you are ready but here, come and watch the video. You were late on that rotation. That cost us two points. You came off the floor. You hung your head. You were mad because you didn't make that play so now you were jogging instead of sprinting that lane. And look at the 4th, 5th year guys, look what they are doing." (C3)

In addition to improving technical and tactical skills, coaches tried to provide playing opportunities in games to first-year athletes. This typically took place in situations with little pressure where they increased their chances of being successful:

You can train three hours, five days a week, but if you don't put it in real life game situations, you don't know whether the training is successful or not. They have to play. You put them in competitive situations where you can measure whether the training is working, whether they are recovering from an injury. You have to have these measurables that you can use to see whether there has been any kind of advancements. . . . If it's five minutes, how was your five minutes? (C1)

We may try to limit some tactical things while first-year kids are on the floor. "We are only going to play *this* defense. He is going to have *this* responsibility. We are only going to do *this* offensively." We are going to minimize his paralysis from analysis. Just let him get his feet wet without getting destroyed emotionally. (C3)

Other coaches let first-year athletes play in even less demanding situations such as pre-season or exhibition games:

[I put first-year athletes in competition] more in preseason. In the beginning of the year and the pre-season, you can explore. You can try different things you normally wouldn't

try in your regular season. . . .In regular season you can't do that so much because you are trying to make the playoffs and win championships. (C1)

In our first exhibition game, the opponent coach and I had agreed we would play two matches: one Friday night and one Saturday night. I said, "Well how about on Saturday at 11 in the morning, we run a bench vs. bench kind of an all-rookie game?" He really liked that idea. So we did that. . . .The first-years are playing against the other team's first-years so they are not getting killed. (C2)

Interestingly, some coaches deliberately put in first-year athletes under challenging game situations in order to expose them to their mistakes:

Sometimes, if there are guys who I think are good, then I will put them in situations where they are going to be under some fire. Sometimes I will do that to show them that they are not ready too. (C3)

Another key aspect of first-year athletes' athletic development was their physical capabilities. Specifically, first-year athletes often needed individualized strength and conditioning programs that were different from the senior athletes:

Usually first-year athletes have some sort of muscular imbalances or impingements, unless they have been really well coached through their club career and have been in the weight room properly. So we often spend a good part of their first year getting them strong enough to play with 22 and 23 year olds. . . .They are boys who are playing with men when they come in. It takes them a little while to adjust to the strength and the speed. (C2)

The weight lifting program might be different for a first-year kid because he is probably developing strength and endurance. A senior athlete probably already has the strength,

so he's working on a different part. . . .Seniors had three years in the gym working on their skills that a first-year kid hasn't had. (C1)

Finally, coaches also discussed teaching first-year athletes aspects of injuries and nutritional practices that were previously unfamiliar to them:

First-years have to learn to take care of their bodies. . . .Many of them run into chronic injuries because they are unaware of how to take care of their bodies. They don't ice after practice. They don't stretch. They've never been through a situation where they are practicing or playing six days a week. (C6)

I had one kid who didn't believe in eating fruits and vegetables. Before games, he wanted to go to McDonald's. . . .I am still working with the nutritionist and him. . . .It's a special treatment. I wouldn't go to my 5th year player and say, "What are you eating?" (C7)

Academics. Coaches emphasized the importance of academic achievements, including its importance in their post-university lives:

Academics is important because you are not here to play basketball. You are here to get an education and get onto this world and make your money and make your millions.

There may be the odd that 1% that makes it to the NBA, and there is the 1% that makes it to Europe and pro. So where are you going to make your money? I am sorry, it takes money to live in this world. It takes a job to satisfy your needs. (C7)

If you get the grades, then you don't have to worry about school so you can concentrate more on developing your athletic abilities. So you can't be successful in one aspect. You have to be successful in every part of your life. Successful people are successful in everything they do. (C6)

Given the strong emphasis on academics, coaches used a number of methods to facilitate the academic success of their first-year athletes. First, they carefully examined the athletes' academic backgrounds and interests during recruitment:

The bottom line that I say to most people that I am attracted to [during recruitment] is that "If [our school] doesn't offer a program or doesn't seem to provide an academic area that you are interested in, then don't come here. Don't come here just to play hockey." (C8)

[During recruitment,] I like the kids who have some academic goals. I've talked to kids who were like, "I don't know what I want to do with my life, I kind of like this." To me that's a bad sign because I want a kid to come in and have some drive and at least to feel that it's important to get a degree. . . .Not everybody has the same academic acumen and ability. That's fine. I just want guys who are willing to put the effort in to try to get what they can get and work to their level without excuses. (C3)

Second, coaches constantly reiterated the importance of the academic achievements to their first-year athletes:

One of our philosophies, and something that we've mentioned quite a bit with the coaching staff is, "Gentle rain soaks." We always keep on giving the same message. It's not a thunderstorm where we scream at them. But it's, "How are you doing in school? It's important you go to every class. Are you going to every class? Are you on top of your work?" (C6)

I don't go out of the rooms to see if they are in class, but I will say to them, "Were you at all your classes this week?" and if they weren't, I ask, "Why not?" The biggest

relationship between academic success and academic failure is attendance in class. We try to get that across. (C2)

Third, coaches monitored the first-year athletes' academic progress. Specifically, coaches either directly monitored their progress or relied on a designated academic personnel that oversaw this process. For example, one coach (C1) said, "We are on top of their academics. We monitor their results. Every exam and paper is monitored. We have their marks." Another coach relied on an academic advisor:

[I can see how focused they are] by their results. They got group work sessions. "Are you attending your sessions with the groups?" See where I was [before the interview]? That's what I was talking to our [academic advisor] about. I wanted to know who has been at the study sessions, who have brought in their notes. (C7)

However, some coaches mentioned that athletes were often passive or unreliable in reporting their academic progress, which made monitoring their academic progress difficult:

We have to keep our eye on the first-year kids because of [their potential academic struggle], but it's not the easiest thing. As a coach you don't have access to the academic system. We don't get to see their grades on a regular basis. We have to wait till transcripts are produced and we can get copies, or till you have someone who come in and say, "Coach I am really struggling in that class." That takes the initiative from the athletes to step forward. It's a little different with where the first-year kids are coming from. (C4)

A guy will sit across the table from me and say, "Everything is going great, I killed that test." And it's like, maybe he passed it. We have some really good students [but] that's

not all of them. The better students are fine but we have some guys who believe they have done the work. They fool themselves into doing that. (C3)

Fourth, coaches strongly advocated the use of seminars and support programs designated for first-year student-athletes that taught useful skills and provided resources that were helpful in achieving academic success:

We have a first-year academic support program. Every Sunday, they have a one hour seminar. It could be on note-taking, the use of the web-based lecture notes, how to prepare for exams, dietary things, residence food, and mental skills. There is a whole variety of them. . . .After the seminar is a first-year study hall. There is a couple levels in the library reserved for first years. There are tutors, or senior students who excelled in [first-year courses]. Those kinds of things. So you can get help and extra resources. (C2)

[The freshmen mentoring program] starts off at the beginning of the year when all the freshmen meet and they go over policies, expectations, a clinic or workshop on nutrition, time management, [and so on]. They go through a number of these things. Each student athlete is provided with one of these booklets. It includes what to expect, personal counselling services, and what's available for them. Every week there is something that they are going to do: organizations, keys to classroom success, goal-setting, test-taking, test anxiety, motivation strategies, academic scoreboard, campus resources, important dates, and a to do list. So you can see there is a process here. If you follow the process, you are going to be successful. (C6)

Given the importance of academics, one of the main challenges for first-year athletes was balancing academics and athletics. One coach (C1) said, “Most freshmen struggle. By the time

January or February comes, they hit that freshmen wall where they are exhausted.” Another coach said:

When you get into middle two weeks of September it's a grind because you are training twice a day, three or four days a week. . . . You are tired, you are [getting] used to school again. It's a grind. When you go through October, you are travelling but then you are in midterms. So you are stressed, stressed, stressed, stressed, stressed. It's a challenge. First-year students really struggle with that. (C3)

Although dropouts were rare, coaches mentioned that the heavy workload first-year athletes faced from both academics and athletics was one of the major reasons for the athletes dropping out of the team:

I had a couple [of athletes] who [dropped out]. School was just tougher than they were prepared to put in. Volleyball was kind of keeping them here, so from a first-year *athlete* perspective they adjusted fine, but they didn't end up being able to stay in school. (C2)

We have had kids come in and quit because they could not handle both sides. They could not handle the workload of being an athlete and being at one of the top universities in the world. You cannot blame them. (C1)

Given the heavy workload, coaches often reduced the volume of their athletic workload and allowed athletes' excused absences from training for academic purposes:

Over the last few years I provided more non-practice days at different times. Scheduled a non-practice day on a day that we normally practiced. I find it as a bit of a refresher. . . .All of a sudden we don't have to go through practice. It's a workout or something different, just change it up a little bit. I found that's had some relative success and kind of reenergized some guys. (C8)

It's the semi-semester [exam period] right now, they text me in the morning and say, "Coach I need to catch up" with whatever it is, important exams. "Can I skip the morning practice?" My answer is always, "Yes, go for it. I will see you in the evening. Your request is fulfilled." Being sensitive to them being student-athletes regardless of how this is going to affect the outcomes on the weekend. (C5)

In addition, a critical aspect of dealing with the heavy workload in their first year in university was their time management skills:

I think it's a case of managing the time. This isn't just related to hockey in my opinion. You have practice time from here to here, there is amount of time before practice you spend getting ready for practice, and there is amount of time after practice you spend finishing up practice. Outside that you got training time that starts here and ends here on any particular day. You've got your classes that go from 10 to 11 am or 2 to 3 pm. It's outside of those times where . . . you need to prepare for whatever is coming up the next day academically. I think fitting all that in can be challenging for anybody. I would think that is the one thing that is most commonly shared among first-year student-athletes. Maximizing their time. (C8)

A lot of times first-year athletes struggle in their first semester with time management. A lot of that is just freedom and flexibility of living on their own. Not being told what to do but just making their own decisions. Some decisions good, some decisions not so good. Usually the common thread is time management piece. (C4)

It's their first time [in university], so they are probably not eating right, sleeping right, not resting, and pulling all-nighters. Those kinds of things. That's what happens to the

freshmen. Their time management skills aren't what they need to be when they get here.

(C1)

Personal life. In addition to their academic and athletic involvement, the coaches also attended to their first-year athletes' personal issues. Particularly, there were a number of problems associated with athletes who were living on their own for the first time and dealing with much greater responsibility and independence. For example, one coach (C5) said, "In general, after this awakening and being on your own away from parents, [they need to] start making all decisions and [carry out] all the chores: cooking, cleaning, and [so on]." Another coach agreed:

I think there is so much going on. You have kids who haven't been away from home for the first time in many cases. . . . They got to cook for themselves and pay bills. . . . You've got to pay your rent. You got to make sure things happen. You know, real life. You have to have those life skills. I'd prefer not to have those kids whose parents are paying the rent directly for him or the bills. You know, learn to deal with that stuff. I think that's important. Again, it's his responsibility. (C3)

Second, some coaches discussed that homesickness could negatively influence the first-year athletes who were living alone away from family and significant others, and indicated that social support from their teammates alleviated some of the homesickness:

The other part is there are some kids who struggle with anxiety being away from their families. They have their support network at home that they don't have when they come to university in their first semester. A lot of times the team part takes on that structure for them. It takes some kids a little bit longer to integrate into that. (C4)

They are away from their girlfriends. They are away from a lot of their high school friends. It's a new environment. Things are not going well, and they get a little lonely where they haven't developed a network of friends. (C6)

On the other hand, some coaches said that homesickness was not a major factor for their first-year athletes, which they attributed to staying in touch with their families and significant others through technology:

I think since the advance of Skype, you know you can kiss your mommy good night every night on the screen if you want to. It's made a huge difference. The ability of being, not just vocally, but visually connected to the family if you want to be. (C2)

I think technology certainly helps. When I was in university I spent a ton of money on long-distance calls because my girlfriend [lived far]. . . .Now you can email every day, you can use FaceTime or Skype. Long-distance calls are nothing. That's the biggest thing. Technology probably alleviates some of the homesickness. (C3)

Interestingly, one volleyball coach and one hockey coach also explained that homesickness was not a major issue because their first-year athletes had lived alone away from their families prior to coming to university. The volleyball coach (C2) said: "I don't think [homesickness affects first-year athletes], not with these guys anyways. Most of these guys have been elite athletes for a long time. They are away at tournaments and training camps on a regular basis." The hockey coach had a similar view:

I do not think [homesickness is] much of an issue with the people that I coach. Some of the guys who come in to us at 20 or 21 have been away from home since they were 15. They go to another city every winter to play Hockey. For a majority of them, I could almost say all of them have been away from home before coming to university. (C8)

Furthermore, living alone provided the first-year athletes with more freedom and social opportunities. The coaches discussed that the social experiences can distract the first-year athletes from their academic and athletic responsibilities. This was often exacerbated in universities located in urban cities:

You have to be aware that they are not partying too much. For some kids getting away from home, that's an easy thing. They have to understand that they are not a typical student. The guy who lives across the hall . . . is up till 3 am every morning and he parties two or three nights a week. . . . You are not living that life. . . . You are going to be up, lifting, training, practicing, and traveling. (C3)

First year is your hardest year, due to all the different factors. . . . It could be overwhelming for first-year students. Especially when you come to a great city with the kind of nightlife here during your first month. Now you are struggling to catch up academically. We warn our athletes about the nightlife in [this city]. Make them aware of it. We schedule 7 am practices so they can't enjoy it too much. I understand that they need their nights and they need their time. So we try to balance that out. (C1)

A specific area of concern was brought up by the coaches who were situated in large metropolitan cities where the dangers of the big city attractions were a concern that might lead to unhealthy behaviours, such as alcohol abuse:

With some first-year athletes, there may be some very serious consequences. They could overindulge in alcohol. Some of them may be caught drinking underage. They may get involved in doing drugs. They may have certain experiences with the opposite sex. There is a whole spectrum of consequences. (C6)

I've met with my first years and said, "I know you can't get into the bars. The [senior] guys are going to have some parties in their houses. . . . There is nothing illegal [with being in those parties], but you cannot drink" . . . We've had that discussion. Then the heat is on me, "Oh don't be a wimp, you got to have a beer." "No, Coach said no. I am following coach's rules." Put it on me, that's ok. (C2)

Finally, this life transition from high school to university differently influenced the first-year athletes depending on their previous living backgrounds and school environments:

It depends where those kids are coming from. There are different cultural parts that you need to be taking into account. Kids coming from different provinces live different lifestyles. Some are a little bit more hectic, some are a little bit more laid back. Some can be influenced a lot more than others. You have to keep your eye on that as a coach as well and know the character of your players. (C4)

Particularly at our university, you are coming into an environment from where you may have been big in the high school campus and in your community because it was so small. You come in here and you are basically nobody. . . . We had someone who stayed at a much smaller university for two years and then came here. He couldn't handle the bureaucracy. . . . They are very challenging. There are so many new things. For example, his courses weren't quite what he wanted. So he wanted another course. Class was full. He wanted to meet with the departmental head. There was a big line-up in the department head. He was told to go to the registrar. So he went to the registrar and there is a big line-up at the registrar and the registrar told him to go see someone else. While at [previous university], it was one-stop shopping. "Oh you need this? Let's see what we can do. Oh you are Richard! Yeah we know about you. We will get it done." (C6)

Summary of Results

The purpose of the current study was to investigate university coaches' experiences and strategies for coaching first-year student-athletes. Eight accomplished university coaches were individually interviewed. At the time of the interviews, all participants were current head coaches of male interdependent team sports in the CIS, averaging 20 years of head coaching experience at this level. Thematic analysis of the interview data led to the creation of five distinct themes, which were called: *career progression*, *coaching style*, *personal makeup of first-year athlete*, *supportive atmosphere*, and *development of first-year athlete*. Further, development of first-year athlete included three sub-themes, which were called: *athletics*, *academics*, and *personal life*.

The coaches discussed their athletic and coaching experiences up to and including their current positions. All eight coaches competed at the university level as athletes in the same sport that they now coach, and two of them had a professional athletic career post-university. Most coaches said their own athletic transition from high school to university was challenging. Following their athletic careers, coaches took different pathways to their current university positions, which included assistant coaching, head coaching at other levels (e.g., high school, college, club), and working outside of sports. During their coaching career, they developed their knowledge and skills by using a variety of sources that included self-reflection, conferences, written resources, and mentors. Collectively, the many years of experience they had both as athletes and coaches influenced and shaped their coaching career.

All coaches adopted a style where they cared for their athletes on a personal level, occasionally describing coaching as parenting. Their ultimate goal was to help their athletes excel in athletics and academics, and succeed in life after university. The coaches emphasized

the importance of building trusting relationships with their first-year athletes which was partly accomplished by regular communications, including interest and concern in their academic, athletic, and personal matters.

A key element of their university coaching career was attributed to effective recruiting skills that involved identifying athletes who had good work ethic, were positive, persevered, and responsible. During the course of the season, the coaches purposefully aimed to build the confidence of their first-year athletes by putting them in situations where they were likely to succeed. Coaches also built a positive team environment to integrate the rookies to the team, with the help of team building activities and senior athlete leaders of the team. This positive team environment was also enhanced by the coaches setting high standards of excellence in and out of the athletic setting for all their athletes, and by showing a great deal of patience with the first-year athletes' mistakes and development.

Coaches spent a large amount of time during the interview discussing the first-year athletes' athletic, academic, and personal matters. In relation to athletics, first-year athletes often lacked a skill set to play at the university level and had to fill lower-status roles on their teams compared to high school. To help them prepare for university level athletics, coaches developed their technical and tactical skills through practice, as well as their physical capabilities through strength and conditioning programs. They also gave some playing time to first-year athletes that typically took place in less stressful situations such as pre-season or exhibition games. Finally, coaches taught aspects of injuries and nutritional practices to their first-year athletes.

In addition to their athletic development, coaches emphasized the importance of the first-year athletes' academic achievements. Thus, coaches monitored their academic progress and encouraged them to utilize academic resources such as academic advisors, tutors, and peer

support programs. Coaches noted how many first-year athletes struggled with the heavy academic demands in addition to their athletic requirements. Recognizing the potential of athlete stress at this time, coaches often reduced the volume of their athletic workload, and highlighted the importance of time management skills to their first-year athletes.

Finally, coaches were aware that many first-year athletes had to live on their own away from family for the first time, which led to several personal challenges. For example, they had to deal with homesickness and greater responsibility and independence with minimal parental guidance. First-year athletes were also given more freedom and social opportunities, which could easily distract them from their academic and athletic responsibilities if they were not carefully monitored by the coaches.

Taken together, the coaches' years of experience in their position helped them effectively guide their first-year athletes in all phases of their personal, academic, and athletic endeavours. Coaches built trusting relationships with their first-year athletes through regular communications, and also created a positive team environment by carefully selecting new incoming athletes and introducing them to team bonding activities and experienced senior athletes who served as effective mentors. In conclusion, coaches purposefully surrounded their first-year athletes with a supportive environment that was conducive to acquiring and developing the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the various demands of being a university student-athlete, and ultimately an effective citizen after university.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate university coaches' experiences and strategies for coaching first-year student-athletes. Eight highly successful university coaches discussed their perceptions of coaching first-year athletes, including the common issues they faced in their academic, athletic, and personal endeavours. This chapter will discuss the results as they pertain to previous research, particularly to expert coaches.

Coaches' Characteristics

The results revealed that the participants exhibited many of the qualities of an effective coach (i.e., Becker, 2009, 2012; Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007). More specifically, the coaches displayed three types of coaching knowledge, namely *professional*, *interpersonal*, and *intrapersonal* knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Gilbert & Côté, 2013). For example, they were aware of the physical, technical, tactical, and mental skills that were taught to the first-year athletes (i.e., professional knowledge), they built trusting relationships and regularly communicated with their athletes (i.e., interpersonal knowledge), and they valued self-reflection as a way to improve their coaching (i.e., intrapersonal knowledge). The coaches in the current study also demonstrated good understanding of the contextual requirements of university coaching, which has also been identified as a common characteristic of expert coaches (e.g., Côté and Gilbert, 2009; Côté et al., 2007). For example, they understood that athletes in a university setting have intensive academic workloads. As such, they carefully monitored their academic progress and often reduced their athletic workloads during exam periods. Finally, the coaches also shared several personal attributes that other successful university coaches have exhibited (e.g., Becker, 2009, 2012;

Bloom & Salmela, 2000). For example, they had a strong desire to learn and continually expand their coaching knowledge. They were also sensitive to their athletes' personal concerns and needs, factors which they felt enhanced their coaching practices. Taken together, these results indicated that the coaches in the current study shared many of the characteristics of previous descriptions of an effective university coach (Becker, 2009, 2012; Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Côté et al., 2007).

Aside from exhibiting characteristics of expert coaches, it should also be noted that the current sample of coaches had averaged 20 years as a CIS head coach. It could be concluded that all of these participants espoused a similar coaching philosophy that focused on their student-athletes' academic achievements and personal growth in addition to developing athletic skills. Previous coaching literature found that this holistic approach to coaching was a critical element of building a successful university athletic program (Vallée & Bloom, 2005) and of coaching international athletes who were adapting to a new environment (Duchesne, Bloom, & Sabiston, 2011). Similarly, this holistic approach to coaching may be particularly relevant with coaching first-year athletes because they are given greater degree of freedom as a result of transitioning from high school to university, which requires them to make personal efforts to invest and commit to their academic and career development (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Acknowledging this, the coaches aimed to maximize their first-year athletes' academic success by recruiting academically strong student-athletes, monitoring their progress, and encouraging the use of resources such as tutors and first-year academic support programs. Coaches discussed that this holistic approach to coaching was a critical element of helping their athletes achieve success in and out of sport settings in their first year, which was essential in preparing them for their subsequent university years, as well as life after university. In sum, the results revealed that

the current sample of coaches adopted a holistic coaching philosophy that focused on developing their athletes in all aspects of life, which was further enhanced by the personal qualities and expert knowledge that they have acquired over decades of coaching experiences.

Athletes' Characteristics

Most coaches highlighted that effectively coaching first-year athletes began with successful recruiting. These results are similar to Rathwell, Bloom, and Loughhead (2014) that found Canadian university coaches reported recruiting highly skilled athletes as one of the most important tasks for building a successful CIS football program. While the coaches in the current study also aimed to recruit skilled athletes, they also selected athletes who possessed personal attributes that they felt would help them cope with the challenges and stressors of being a first-year student-athlete, and would fit in well with their current team. These findings are consistent with research that highlighted the importance of athletes' personal characteristics (Becker & Solomon, 2005; Giacobbi, Roper, Whitney, & Butryn, 2002). For example, Becker and Solomon (2005) found that NCAA division I coaches evaluated their athletes with a heavier emphasis on their psychological characteristics (e.g., hard-working, receptivity to coaching, willingness to learn) than their physical capabilities (e.g., strength, speed, and reaction time). Further, Giacobbi and colleagues (2002) conducted interviews with 10 NCAA division I coaches, which revealed that university athletes who were highly motivated, competitive, and emotionally mature tended to be more successful during their university sport career. Correspondingly, the coaches in the current study spent a substantial amount of time and effort prior to the start of the season to assess the potential recruits' personal makeup in order to maximize the possibility of their success in their first year in university.

One particular mental construct of athletes that could be important in making successful transitions into university is *coachability*. Coachability is a complex construct that has been linked to a number of personal attributes such as receptivity to coach feedback, openness to change, trust and respect for the coach, ability to positively interact with others, and emotional and mental maturity (Favor, 2011; Solomon, 2010). It appears that the coaches were looking for a number of these attributes in the potential recruits, which they assessed by personally interacting with them and watching their behaviours in their high school settings. For example, the coaches were aware that first-year athletes were exposed to more complex and higher levels of coaching as they entered university. As such, they carefully assessed whether the potential recruits appeared respectful and receptive to their high school coaches' feedback. Coaches also paid particular attention to how they responded to frustrating situations during games to help assess their emotional maturity, a factor that coaches believed would help them cope with the challenges that they were likely to face in their first year in university. Lastly, coaches monitored how they interacted with their teammates and responded to their teammates' mistakes. These efforts made by coaches during recruitment ensured that incoming first-year athletes possessed the ability to adapt to the new environment, coaches, and teammates.

Some coaches acknowledged that many of their first-year athletes lost confidence as a result of transitioning to university athletics. This has important implications because self-confidence has been found to be one of the most salient psychological characteristics of successful performers (Feltz, 1988; Woodman & Hardy, 2003), and because athletes with low self-confidence view their coaches more negatively (Kenow & Williams, 1992), and tend to interpret their anxiety in a more debilitating manner (Hanton, Mellalieu, & Hall, 2004). According to the influential work by Bandura (1977, 1982), two factors that can facilitate self-

confidence are *performance accomplishments* (i.e., having performed a task successfully in the past) and *vicarious experience* (i.e., watching someone else perform a task successfully). It appears that the coaches in this sample understood and used Bandura's ideas to build their first-year athletes' confidence. More specifically, they deliberately put their first-year athletes in low-pressure game situations where they were likely to perform well, and thus feel more confident. Coaches also used older athletes who acted as effective role models perhaps as a way to help them relate to their older teammates who had learned to cope with similar challenges. Taken together, the coaches made efforts to maximize the probability of their athletes' success in their first year, which they achieved by recruiting athletes who were coachable and by subsequently building their confidence.

Supportive Atmosphere

All of the coaches did their best to help their first-year athletes feel comfortable and supported during their first year in university. One method of accomplishing this goal was the creation of a positive coach-athlete relationship (cf. Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007), that helped the coaches sell their vision and philosophy to their athletes. These results are consistent with Vallée and Bloom (2005) who found that highly successful university coaches built positive relationships with their athletes and cared for their personal needs, which led the athletes to buy into their coaches' vision and team goals. In particular, the current results could be interpreted through the notion of *shared understanding* in the coach-athlete relationship literature (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013). Coach-athlete dyads are said to have established shared understanding when they not only exhibit similar feelings, thoughts, and behaviours, but also interpret each other accurately (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013). To establish shared understanding, Lorimer and Jowett suggested that coaches and athletes should engage in open dialogues and actively attempt to

understand each other in and out of their athletic settings. In line with these suggestions, the coaches in the current sample regularly communicated with their athletes and asked them about their experiences during their first year in university. In sum, the coaches made deliberate efforts to build personal relationships with first-year athletes and to provide support to ensure they adapted to their new environment. Coaches believed that a result of these efforts was that their first-year athletes began to trust their coaches and thus buy into their vision and philosophy.

In addition to establishing personal relationships with their first-year athletes, coaches also relied on the guidance and support of their senior athletes. The coaches' felt these athletes were important in easing the transition of the first-year athletes, which also enhanced team success. Similarly, Benson, Evans, and Eys (2015) recently interviewed coaches and athletes of male and female intercollegiate sport teams from Canada about socialization tactics for integrating new members into existing teams. Their interviews revealed that veteran athletes on the team helped address issues that coaches were not aware of or did not have time to deal with such as teaching social norms of the team and providing social support for newcomers. While the majority of leadership research in sport has previously focused on the coach, researchers recently began to pay greater attention to leadership exhibited by athletes and its outcomes (Bucci, Bloom, Loughead, & Caron, 2012; Dupuis, Bloom, & Loughead, 2006; Eys, Loughead, & Hardy, 2007; Loughead, Hardy, & Eys, 2006; Vincer & Loughead, 2010). For example, effective athlete leadership has been shown to enhance team cohesion (Vincer & Loughead, 2010), athlete satisfaction (Eys et al., 2007), and improve communications between the coaching staff and athletes within the team (Bucci et al., 2012; Dupuis et al., 2006). Consistent with these results, the current sample of coaches relied on their senior athletes' leadership to maximize the first-year athletes' learning and development. For example, they carefully assessed the leadership

abilities of their senior athletes during the selection of team captains, and utilized them to set high standards of excellence, establish a team culture, and enhance communication between the coaching staff and athletes. Concurrently, coaches tried to develop leadership abilities in other athletes who were expected to fill leadership roles once the current team captains graduated and left the team. Coaches believed that a consistent presence of effective athlete leaders year after year was critical to creating an optimal environment for the development of incoming first-year athletes.

In addition to team captains, the coaches also discussed the importance of informal peer leaders for developing first-year athletes. As opposed to formal athlete leaders who serve designated leadership roles in the team (e.g., captains, assistant captains) and tend to influence the team as a whole, informal peer leaders have been described as those who tend to influence a smaller number of individuals within the team and do not necessarily occupy designated leadership roles (Loughead et al., 2006). Similarly, coaches in the current study discussed that the informal leaders in their teams influenced the first-year athletes more on an individual basis rather than the team as a whole. For example, coaches often asked a senior athlete to serve as a mentor for a first-year athlete who was enrolled in a similar academic program or shared the same first language. This has important implications as Hoffmann and Loughead (2015) recently found that intercollegiate athletes who felt that they were effectively peer mentored reported higher levels of satisfaction in their teams, relative to their non-peer mentored counterparts. Collectively, it appears that both formal and informal forms of athlete leadership are important in helping first-year athletes successfully transition into university. Taken together, the current results suggest that coaches should make deliberate efforts to ensure that effective athlete

leadership is present on the team on a consistent basis, and use both formal and informal forms of athlete leadership to guide athletes in their first year in university.

Some of the coaches also used team building activities (e.g., team retreats during the pre-season) to establish a positive team atmosphere and to help integrate the incoming first-year athletes to the team. Consistent with the current results, several intervention studies have found that team building activities enhanced overall team cohesion (Senécal, Loughead, & Bloom, 2008; Stevens & Bloom, 2003), as well as team and individual performance (Voight & Callaghan, 2001). A unique finding of the current study is that while these coaches believed that team building activities enhanced team cohesion and were beneficial to all team members, they believed that these activities were particularly helpful for first-year athletes because they provided an unthreatening environment for them to learn about their new coaches and teammates, understand the team dynamics, and voice their opinions that they might feel intimidated to share in other settings. Given that research in the team building literature is still underdeveloped (Loughead & Bloom, 2013), there has been little research on the effectiveness of team building activities in integrating first-year athletes into university sport teams. Thus, a possible avenue for future research in this area could include quantitative studies measuring first-year athletes' perceptions of team cohesion and performance, as well as qualitative studies on their perceptions on the usefulness of team building activities. In sum, the current results suggest that coaches should actively incorporate team building activities to facilitate communication and build camaraderie between first-year and senior athletes. Taken together, the coaches in the current study aimed to establish a supportive atmosphere in the team that allowed first-year athletes to feel comfortable and accepted in their new surroundings, which was mainly achieved

by building personal relationships with them, utilizing senior athletes' leadership, and incorporating team building activities.

Development of First-year Athlete

The coaches in the current study felt there were numerous challenges for first-year athletes during their transition to university. These challenges could be divided into their athletic, academic, and personal matters, which is similar to findings from empirical studies of athletes attending both Canadian and American universities (e.g., Côté & Salmela, 1996; Duchesne et al., 2011; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). The current results add to this body of research literature by specifically focusing on first-year university athletes. The following section will provide in-depth discussions of first-year athletes' challenges in each of their athletic, academic, and personal environments, and the strategies the coaches used to help their athletes reach their potential both inside and outside of sport.

Athletics. As a result of moving to a higher athletic level of competition, the coaches discussed how many first-year athletes lacked the necessary strength and skill to compete at this level. Some athletes had a difficult time accepting their limited playing time or role as a non-starter. This relates to research from Benson, Eys, Surya, Dawson, and Schneider (2013) who found that Canadian university athletes who did not accept their roles exhibited a number of adverse individual (e.g., negative emotions, dropouts from the team) and team outcomes (e.g., violating group norms, creating interpersonal conflicts among teammates). In a related study, Mellalieu and Juniper (2006) found that elite male intercollegiate soccer players in the United States were more likely to accept their roles when they understood how and why their roles contributed to overall team success. The coaches in the current study spent considerable time communicating with their first-year athletes the importance of developing their technical and

physical skills and knowledge during their first season so that they would be ready to assume starting roles in their subsequent years. To facilitate their development, coaches identified several areas that related to the three primary components of the coaching model (CM; Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995), namely *organization*, *training*, and *competition*.

Coaches acknowledged that many of their first-year athletes experienced high levels of stress due to their heavy academic and athletic demands. Studies that examined athletes' perspectives have also shown that balancing the high volume of academic and athletic workload was a significant source of stress in their first year (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Tracey & Corlett, 1995). This is important because stress experienced by intercollegiate athletes can negatively influence their psychological and emotional well-being (Humphrey, Yow, & Bowden, 2000). To minimize the stress experienced by their athletes, the current coaches paid attention to their athletes' academic requirements (e.g., classes and dates of main tests) and reduced the volume of training during their heavy academic periods. More specifically, coaches' organizational skills and the ability to create appropriate training plans were key elements of individual and team success at both Canadian (Vallée & Bloom, 2005) and American universities (Duchesne et al., 2011). The current results demonstrate the importance of university coaches' adjusting their training sessions for those first-year athletes who have yet to learn to balance the heavy academic and athletic workloads.

Another important area of concern related to the athletes' physical conditions, including their injury management and nutritional practices. Specifically, research has found that university athletes lacked nutritional knowledge (Dunn, Turner, & Denny, 2007; Jacobson, Sobonya, & Ransone, 2001; Torres-McGehee, et al., 2012) and accumulated high rates of sport-related injuries (Kaut, DePompei, Kerr, & Congeni, 2003; Malinauskas, Overton, Carraway, &

Cash, 2007; Selby, Weinstein, & Bird, 1990). Specific to the current study, the coaches made a distinction between their senior and first-year athletes. Senior athletes were believed to engage in proper nutritional practices and injury management, whereas first-year athletes were believed to lack knowledge and overlook their importance, leading to a higher probability of injuries. Thus, the current coaches spent time and effort providing nutritional information to their first-year athletes and encouraged them to utilize the physical conditioning staff to build their strength and stamina, as well as to learn proper injury prevention and management techniques. These findings confirm the importance of organizational tasks related to ensuring athletes' physical conditioning (e.g., Côté & Salmela, 1996; Vallée & Bloom, 2005) and further emphasizes the importance of this role when coaching first-year athletes.

In addition to the physical aspects of athletes' development, coaches also aimed to develop their technical and tactical skills. In their study with Canadian university athletes, Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, and Carron (2005) showed that coaches' instructions enhanced non-starters' understanding of their responsibilities during the execution of game strategies, while this effect was not seen with starters. These results imply that first-year athletes, who tend to be non-starters, may need more clarification of their roles and responsibilities from their coaches. In fact, the current coaches explained that they spent extra time and effort in training environments to provide more feedback for first-year athletes. In sum, the current coaches adjusted their training programs and the amount of instructions for first-year athletes to address their needs and improve their physical, technical, and tactical skills, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach. Research has consistently found that coaching practices are effective when they are tailored to their athletes' abilities and needs (e.g., Côté et al., 1995; Côté et al., 2007). The current study extends this body of literature by offering coaches' insights on accommodating the

needs of those first-year athletes whose skills and knowledge are yet to adapt to a new level of competition.

Although first-year athletes were not provided with large amounts of playing time, the coaches still felt that competitions were important for their development. Thus, coaches did their best to allocate some playing time for their first-year athletes, which typically took place in pre-season or exhibition games or at the end of regular season games when the outcome was not the main focus. This allowed the coaches to monitor the improvements of their first-year athletes' skills and assess the effectiveness of their current training methods. Other expert coaches also used their athletes' competitive performance as an important source of information to evaluate the effectiveness of their training regimen (Bloom, Durand-Bush, & Salmela, 1997; Côté et al., 1995). While the current results support these previous empirical findings, they further highlight the unique role of competition for coaching first-year athletes. For example, it appears that exposing first-year athletes to competitions in spite of their lack of skills served an important purpose as it allowed coaches to monitor their progress and design effective training programs to improve each athlete's skill set. Taken together, the coaches identified several tasks that were important in the development of their athletes, which included helping them accept their roles, organizing training plans, and improving their physical, technical, and tactical skills. While many of these tasks have been found to be central to coaching university athletes (e.g., Benson et al., 2013; Duchesne et al., 2011; Vallée & Bloom, 2005), the current study highlights their added value for coaching first-year athletes, including effective coaching strategies.

Academics. Similar to other expert university coaches (Davies, Bloom, & Salmela, 2005; Vallée & Bloom, 2005), the current coaches emphasized that their ultimate goal was facilitating their athletes' academic achievements to prepare for them for life after university. Interestingly,

Miller and Kerr (2002) found that student-athletes tended to emphasize their athletic identity over their academics upon entry into university, and gradually shifted their focus to their academic and personal achievements as they approached graduation. This could imply that first-year athletes are susceptible to over-identifying themselves as athletes rather than as students, which is potentially problematic as Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer (1996) found that high levels of athletic identity inhibited NCAA athletes' ability to develop careers outside of sport. Correspondingly, the current sample of coaches appeared to understand the importance of preventing their first-year athletes from forming a high level of athletic identity. Therefore, they constantly reiterated the importance of academic success to their first-year athletes and monitored their progress to ensure that they did not undermine their academic achievements.

In order to achieve high academic success, the coaches encouraged their first-year athletes to take advantage of the academic resources provided by their university, which included academic advisors, tutors, and peer mentors. There has been numerous studies within the field of higher education that has investigated the usefulness of academic resources for the general population of first-year students transitioning from high school (Glaser, Hall, & Halperin, 2006; Goff, 2011; Henry, Bruland, & Sano-Franchini, 2011; Jamelske, 2008; Rodger & Tremblay, 2003). These studies have consistently shown the benefits of these resources for first-year students, which included higher academic grades, retention rates, and a sense of belonging to the university community. Although these studies provided evidence that these academic resources are helpful in easing the transition process from high school to university, they were based on the general students and studies that target student-athletes are comparatively rare. Nevertheless, the current coaches believed that such academic resources were critical for their first-year athletes' academic achievements, which may be impeded by the additional challenges from their athletic

settings that their student counterparts would not experience. These results suggest that university coaches should be aware of the available academic resources at their institutions and advise their first-year athletes to utilize such resources. In summary, the current coaches concurred with other experienced university coaches that the main goal of their coaching was promoting their athletes' academic success (Davies et al., 2005; Vallée & Bloom, 2005), and thus reiterated this goal to their first-year athletes who often undermined its value, and strongly advocated the use of academic resources to facilitate their academic development.

Personal life. In comparison to athletics and academics, coaches devoted the least amount of time discussing their first-year athletes' personal matters. One topic that received attention was homesickness. Studies on the general population of students transitioning into university has revealed that homesickness was associated with numerous adverse outcomes such as psychological disturbance, anxiety, and lower levels of psychological well-being (Fisher & Hood, 1987; Fisher, Murray, & Frazer, 1985). Some of the current coaches also indicated that their first-year athletes experienced homesickness as a result of moving away from their family and significant others, and identified social support from their teammates as an important coping method. This is similar to the findings by Giacobbi et al. (2004) that found first-year athletes relied on their teammates' support in dealing with numerous transitional challenges that included homesickness. Interestingly, three coaches in the current sample felt homesickness was not a major concern. They felt that advanced technology (e.g., Long-distance calls, Skype, FaceTime) allowed athletes to keep in touch with family and significant others. They also felt that some athletes had already lived away from home and thus had less difficulty with this transition. Consequently, the current results suggest that coaches may need to provide more social support for athletes who have not had previously lived away from family. Research that emanated from

the multidimensional model of leadership (Chelladurai, 1993) has consistently found that coaches' behaviours led to higher levels of athlete satisfaction when they matched the personal preferences of each athlete (e.g., Chelladurai & Carron, 1983; Høigaard, Jones, & Peters, 2008; Horn, Bloom, Berglund, & Packard, 2011). In sum, while homesickness was not a universal concern for all first-year athletes, the current results suggest that coaches should acknowledge each of their athlete's susceptibility to homesickness and utilize the members of the team to provide social support for those in need.

In addition to homesickness, coaches explained that moving away from family allowed more freedom and social opportunities. Coaches were wary of the dangers associated with these social experiences such as alcohol abuse, which were exacerbated in urban metropolitan cities. There are two reasons why this may be particularly concerning for first-year athletes. First, all students transitioning from high school to university have reported increased rates of alcohol abuse (Borsari, Murphy, & Barnett, 2007; Grekin & Sher, 2006; Hartzler & Fromme, 2003). Second, student-athletes compared to non-athletes have exhibited higher rates of alcohol abuse and its associated negative outcomes such as impaired academic work, injuries, and unsafe sexual behaviours (Hildebrand, Johnson, & Bogle, 2001; Leichliter, Meilman, Presley, Cashin, 1998; Nelson & Wechsler, 2001; Yusko, Buckman, White, & Pandina, 2008). The combination of these two factors (i.e., transition into university, participation in athletics) suggests that first-year athletes are at an increased risk of engaging in these destructive behaviours. Given the lack of research in these areas, Coakley and Donnelly (2009) indicated that more research is required to investigate why, when, and how university athletes partake in these behaviours. This line of research could also provide insights on whether first-year athletes are indeed at a greater risk. Nonetheless, the current results illuminate the potential dangers associated with social

experiences such as athletes' alcohol abuse, and further imply its increased danger for first-year athletes who may be more likely to engage in these behaviours.

In conclusion, the current coaches indicated that their athletes experienced a wide range of challenges in their athletic, academic, and personal domains during their first-year in university. Coaches identified coaching strategies that included organizing training plans to help athletes improve their physical, technical, and tactical skills and advocating the use of academic resources, and also discussed about the potential dangers of homesickness and unhealthy behaviours associated in their personal life. While many of these strategies form an integral part of university coaching in general, this study extends the current literature by highlighting the importance of adapting these strategies to the needs of first-year athletes in particular.

Chapter 6

Summary of Study

Participation in intercollegiate athletics provides unique challenges to the student-athletes who are required to balance high volume of athletic and academic workloads with their personal life. These challenges could be exacerbated for first-year athletes who are facing these challenges for the first time. Previous studies on university coaching have largely focused on the general population of student-athletes, and those that targeted first-year athletes were limited to athletes' perspectives. Thus, the purpose of the current study was to investigate university head coaches' perceptions, experiences and strategies used with first-year athletes. Specifically, this study identified coaches' views on the athletes' challenges during their transitions from high school into university, as well as ways to ease this transition process.

Upon the ethics approval from McGill Research Ethics Board, eight highly successful and experienced university head coaches of men's volleyball, ice hockey, and basketball teams from Ontario and Québec were recruited. The participants averaged about 20 years of experience, which ranged from about 10 to 40 years as a head coach. To collect data, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted by following an interview guide created by the researchers based on the research literature on university coaching. All interviews were conducted by the primary researcher and took place at each of the participant's academic institution. Prior to the interviews, coaches were verbally explained their rights as research participants, and were asked to read and sign a consent form. The interviews lasted 81 minutes on average, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim before a thematic analysis was conducted.

The results revealed five distinct themes: *career progression*, *coaching style*, *personal makeup of first-year athlete*, *supportive atmosphere*, and *development of first-year athlete*.

Further, development of first-year athlete included three sub-themes that were called *athletics*, *academics*, and *personal life*. *Career progression* refers to coaches' athletic and coaching backgrounds and how their coaching careers evolved, and *coaching style* relates to their athlete-centered approach to coaching that influenced their decisions and behaviours. *Personal makeup of first-year athlete* pertains to the personal characteristics that coaches valued and aimed to develop in their athletes. *Supportive atmosphere* highlights the ways they built a positive team environment that helped integrate first-year athletes into the new team. *Development of first-year athlete* relates to how coaches developed their first-year athletes with regards to their *athletics*, *academics*, and *personal lives*.

Although coaches reached their current positions through different career pathways, they shared several common characteristics. For example, they had excellent sport specific knowledge, but also had strong interpersonal skills and constantly self-reflected on their own experiences to improve their coaching practices. All coaches adopted a similar coaching style, which focused on caring for their athletes at a personal level and helping them become better athletes, as well as successful people in society after graduation. Based on this coaching philosophy, coaches identified several strategies useful for coaching first-year athletes. More specifically, coaches highlighted that coaching first-year athletes began with effective recruiting, and offered a number of important recruitment criteria that included athletic talent, fit with the current team, and the athletes' personality. Coaches also emphasized creating a welcoming team environment that was conducive to the development of the first-year athletes, and discussed about ways to build such atmosphere. Additionally, coaches discussed the common challenges that their first-year athletes experienced in their athletic, academic, and personal environments. In sum, the current study provided one of the first empirical accounts of head university coaches' views on

the common challenges of being a first-year student-athlete, as well as the coaching strategies that could be helpful in addressing these challenges.

Conclusions

Career Progression

- All coaches competed at the university level during their athletic careers. Most coaches noted their experiences as a first-year athlete were challenging.
- Coaching was a natural transition following their athletic retirement.
Coaches took different pathways to their current positions, including assistant coaching at the university level, coaching in other levels of competition (e.g., professional, high school), and working outside of sport.
- Coaches constantly improved their coaching practices by learning from conferences, books, other coaches and mentors, and by self-reflecting on their own experiences.
- Coaches emphasized that the accumulation of many years of coaching experiences helped them mature as coaches and shaped their current coaching styles.

Coaching Style

- Coaches aimed to develop their athletes in all aspects of life, which included their athletic, academic, and personal achievements. Their ultimate goal of coaching was to give their athletes information and tools that would help them succeed in life after university.
- Coaches cared for their athletes at a personal level, often describing it as parenting.
- Coaches forged positive relationships with first-year athletes by constant communications and showing interest in their life in and out of sport.

Personal Makeup of First-Year Athlete

- Coaches believed effective recruitment was very important. They selected athletes based on numerous factors, which included athletic skill, previous academic achievement, fit with the current team, and social skills.
- Coaches highly valued first-year athletes who were positive, persevered, hard-working, and responsible, personal characteristics that coaches believed would help them cope with the challenges and adversities during their first year in university.
- Some first-year athletes lacked confidence as a result of transitioning to a higher level of athletic competition. To build their confidence, coaches exposed them to competitive situations where they felt little pressure and were more likely to succeed.

Supportive Atmosphere

- Coaches put a heavy emphasis on creating a positive team environment where their first-year athletes felt accepted and supported by their teammates.
- While coaches expected all members of their teams to meet high standards of excellence on and off the playing field, coaches also showed patience with first-year athletes' mistakes during their development.
- Senior athlete leadership was a critical element of building a positive team environment for first-year athletes. Coaches valued both formal team leaders (i.e., team captains) who established a team culture and informal peer mentors who helped first-year athletes more on an individual basis (e.g., academic help).
- Coaches also utilized team building activities such as team retreats to integrate first-year athletes and strengthen the interrelationships among the members of the team.

Development of First-Year Athlete - Athletics

- As a result of transitioning into a higher level of competition, many first-year athletes

had a limited role that included little playing time.

- Coaches believed that some first-year athletes thought they deserved more playing time, so they had to help motivate them and explain the importance of their roles.
- Coaches created and adapted their training programs to address each player's weaknesses and improve their physical, technical, and tactical skills.
- Additionally, coaches taught the aspects of injuries and nutrition to their first-year athletes who often lacked knowledge in these areas and overlooked their importance.

Development of First-Year Athlete - Academics

- Coaches believed that their athletes' academic achievements were critical to their success in post-university life. Thus, they regularly reminded their first-year athletes of the importance of academic success and monitored their progress in class.
- Additionally, coaches strongly advocated the use of academic resources that were available at their institutions.
- Given the high volume of academic and athletic work, athletes' time management skills were critical for success in their first year in university.
- Coaches often adjusted their training plans and granted absences from training to allow more time for their athletes to complete the high volume of academic work.

Development of First-Year Athlete - Personal Life

- As a result of living alone, many first-year athletes suddenly had greater responsibility and independence in their living situations.
- Some coaches believed that homesickness negatively influenced their first-year athletes, and indicated teammates' social support as an important coping method.
- Other coaches believed that homesickness was not a major concern because of (a)

advanced technology that allowed athletes to keep in touch with family and (b) their previous experience of living alone as a result of their elite sporting background.

- Minimal parental guidance also allowed more social opportunities for first-year athletes, which often distracted them from their academic and athletic responsibilities. This was typically exacerbated in large urban cities.

Practical Implications

The current study represents one of the first empirical accounts of coaching first-year university student-athletes from the head coaches' perspective. Particularly, research on university coaching has primarily focused on the general population of athletes, or have been largely limited to the perspectives of the first-year athlete. The results of this study add experienced coaches' views on the common challenges of coaching first-year university athletes, as well as provide useful strategies to ease this transition process for them.

The coaches spoke about the importance of recruiting. While it may be imperative to recruit talented athletes who have the potential to compete at the university level, coaches should also carefully assess their personality. More specifically, coaches are advised to recruit athletes who exhibit strong interpersonal skills and who positively interact with their high school coaches and teammates, as they are required to build new relationships with the members of their university team. Another important criterion was perseverance as evidenced by their ability to maintain a positive attitude in the face of unfavourable or difficult situations during competitions.

While not ignoring senior athletes, coaches spoke about the importance of allocating additional time for communicating with first-year athletes. First, it can contribute to building trusting relationships with first-year athletes and help them buy into the team vision and long-term goals. Second, it provides opportunities for coaches to initiate conversations regarding their

athletic and academic progress, which may be an importance task with first-year athletes who remain passive about reporting their struggles to coaches and seeking support from others. As a result, coaches will have a better idea of what their first-year athletes' needs are on and off the playing surface, and thus will be able to provide necessary support to meet their needs.

The current study highlighted the role of senior athletes in facilitating the development of first-year athletes. These results may be of benefit for coaches, senior athletes, as well as first-year athletes. For example, coaches should carefully assess the leadership abilities of their senior athletes when selecting team captains, and also encourage senior athletes to serve as mentors for first-year athletes with similar academic and personal interests. Further, this information can help senior athletes understand the importance of their influence on incoming first-year athletes, which may increase their willingness to serve as mentors and reach out to help first-year athletes. Lastly, first-year athletes are advised to actively seek support from the senior members of the team.

The participants highly valued the resources available from their universities such as physical conditioning staff, academic advisors, and first-year support programs that facilitated their first-year athletes' athletic and academic development. The coaches' also noted the first-year athletes' lack of initiative in taking advantage of these resources. These results are of interest to athletic directors and university administrators who should be encouraged to allocate adequate resources to secure these services. Similarly, coaches should become knowledgeable of what resources are available from their institutions and strongly advocate their use by first-year athletes.

Limitations and Recommendations

Although the current study offered insights on university coaches' experiences and strategies used with first-year athletes, a number of limitations must be addressed. First, the small sample size ($N=8$), as well as purposefully recruiting coaches of men's basketball, volleyball, and ice hockey could restrict the generalizability of the current results. While these results could be applicable to all university sports, it is also possible that university sports with different contexts (e.g., female athletes, mix-gender teams, and different roster sizes and seasonal schedules) could necessitate different coaching strategies to accommodate the needs of the first-year athletes. For example, building personal relationships with each of their first-year athlete may be more difficult for football coaches due to its large roster size or for soccer coaches due to its shorter sporting season (i.e., half-season from September to November), and thus they may rely more on their assistant coaches or senior members of the team to communicate with first-year athletes more effectively. Similarly, future research could consider investigating first-year university athletes in the United States who may experience different sets of challenges, as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) tends to have greater amount of revenue generated, provide more resources for coaches and athletes, and receive more media coverage and attention in comparison to those of Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS).

Future research could explore athletes' perspectives on what types of academic resources they find helpful. Coaches discussed the possibility of homesickness and engagement in unhealthy behaviours (e.g., alcohol abuse) by first-year university athletes. Although there is a great deal of research on these topics for the general population of students and all student-athletes, this body of knowledge can be strengthened by focusing on the sub-population of first-year student-athletes. This line of research could also provide insights on effective coping and coaching strategies that can help address these issues for first-year athletes.

In conclusion, as student-athletes graduate from high school and enter university, they experience a number of challenges associated with transitioning to a higher level of athletic competition and new academic and social environments. As intercollegiate athletics provides an effective learning arena that teaches student-athletes important life lessons and skills, it is necessary to continue moving forward with this line of research to further promote an optimal environment that welcomes first-year athletes and lays a foundation for success in life during and after university.

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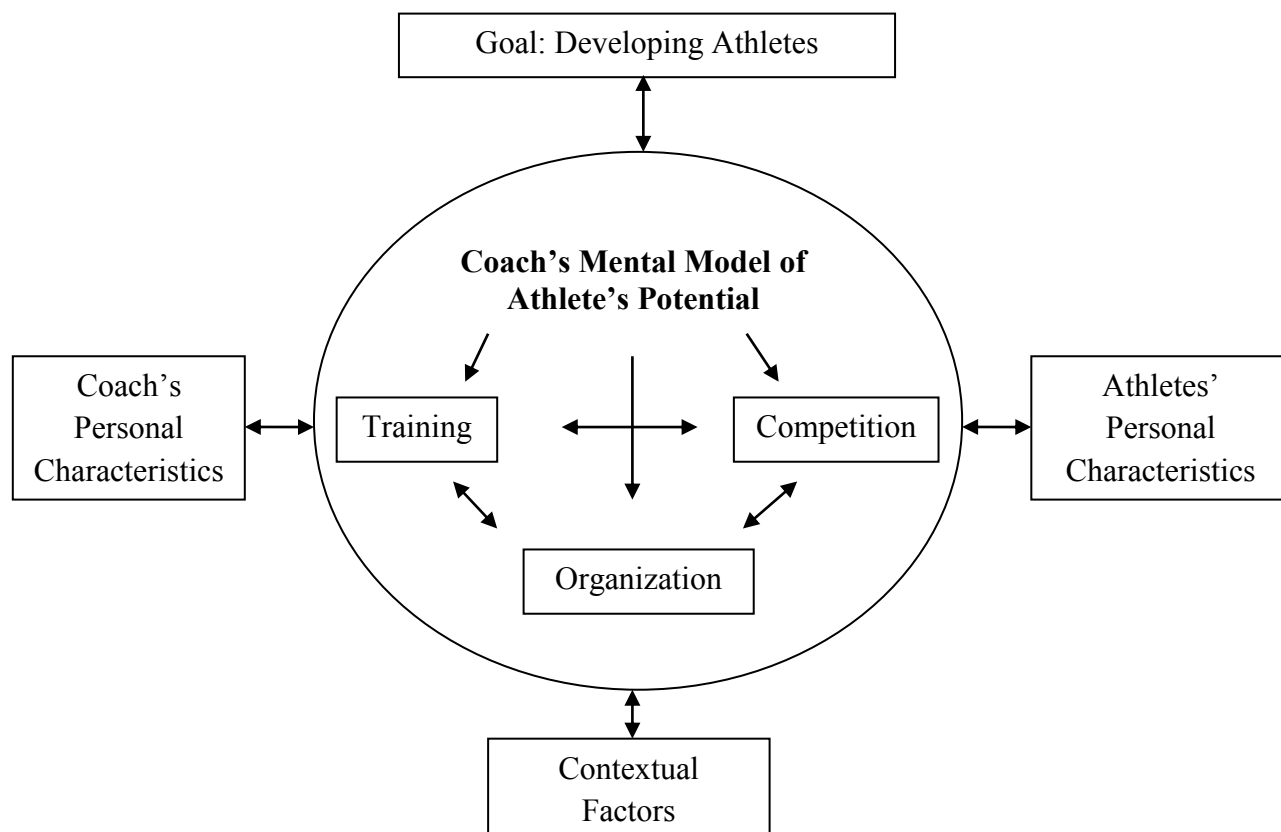
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Appendix A

The Coaching Model

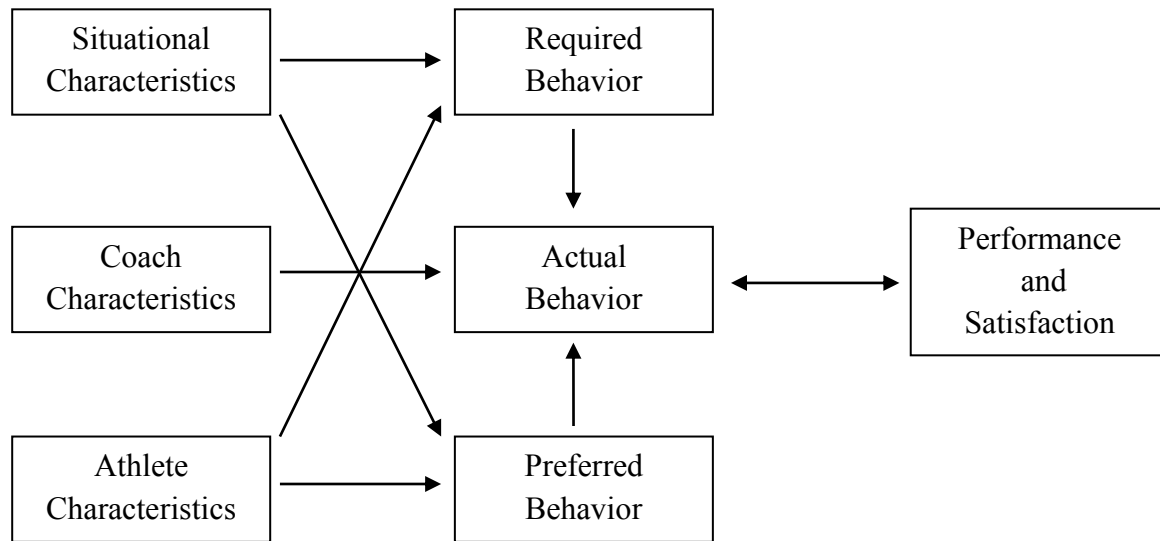


Adapted from :

Côté, J., Salmela, J. H., Trudel, P., Baria, A., & Russell, S. J. (1995). The coaching model: A grounded assessment of expert gymnastic coaches' knowledge. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 1, 1-17.

Appendix B

The Multidimensional Model of Leadership



Adapted from:

Chelladurai, P. (1984). Discrepancy between preferences and perceptions of leadership behavior and satisfaction of athletes in varying sports. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 6, 27-41.

Chelladurai, P. (1993). Leadership. In R. N. Singer, M. Murphey, & L. K. Tennant (Eds.), *Handbook of research on sport psychology* (pp. 647–671). New York: Macmillan.

Appendix C

Recruitment Script

Dear _____,

My name is Jeemin Kim and I am currently completing a Master's degree in sport psychology under the supervision of Dr. Gordon Bloom in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at McGill University. We are contacting you to invite you to participate in our research on university coaches' perceptions and experiences of coaching first year athletes. You will be asked questions regarding your perceptions on first year athletes who are transitioning from high school to university, as well as the coaching strategies used to coach them effectively.

The McGill University Ethics Board has reviewed and accepted this study for its adherence to ethical guidelines. Any information you provide during this study will remain confidential. If you choose to participate, I will conduct a 1-2 hour interview with you at a time and location of your choosing. If more information is required, then a follow-up telephone conversation may occur.

Should you have any questions concerning this study, please contact my supervisor or myself using the information provided at the bottom of the page. The McGill Sport Psychology Research Laboratory has a history of producing influential research on sport coaching and leadership. Please visit our website if you would like to learn more about our research: <http://sportpsych.mcgill.ca>.

Thank you for considering participating in this research project, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Jeemin Kim

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Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts for Jeemin Kim, a graduate student in sport psychology, in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at McGill University. You are invited to participate in our research on university coaches' perceptions and experiences of coaching first year athletes. If you choose to participate in this study you will be requested, without payment, to partake in a 1-2 hour audiotaped interview where you will be asked to discuss your perceptions on first year athletes and coaching strategies used to coach them effectively. If more information is necessary, then a follow-up telephone interview may occur.

Once the interview is complete, you will have the opportunity to edit any comments you made during the interview at your discretion. You will also receive a typed transcription of the interview, which may be edited at your discretion. Prior to publication, you will receive copies of the results and conclusions of the study. The information you provide will **remain confidential**. The principle investigator (Jeemin Kim) and the faculty supervisor (Dr. Gordon Bloom) will be the only individuals to have access to identifiable data. All data, including audio files of the recorded interview(s) and digital copies of the consent form, will be securely stored in encrypted folders on a password-protected computer for a period of seven years. Any paper copies will be converted to digital files and, promptly, destroyed. Pseudonyms will be used to label all digital files. All data will be destroyed seven years after the study ends. The information disclosed during the interview will remain confidential and will be used for publication purposes and scholarly journals or for presentations at conferences. The researchers will not disclose names or identify the study participants at any time. The McGill Research Ethics Board has reviewed this study for compliance with its ethical standards.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory. You are free to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from participation at any time, for any reason, without penalty or prejudice.

After reading the above statement and having had the directions verbally explained, it is now possible for you to provide consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this research project based on the terms outlined in this consent form. You will be provided with a signed copy of this consent form for your records. You may refuse to continue participation at any time, without penalty, and all information gathered will remain confidential. Please contact the Research Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831, or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca if you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights and welfare as a participant in this research study. Please sign below if you agree to participate in this study.

Signature

Date

I agree to the audiotaping of the interviews with the understanding that these recordings will be used solely for the purpose of transcribing these sessions. Yes ☐ No ☐ _____ Initials

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Appendix E

Interview Guide

* Please refer only to athletes transitioning from HIGH SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY (excluding CEGEP)

Pre-interview Routine

Introduction

Consent Form

Remind participation is voluntary, participant may withdraw at any time.

Opening Questions

1. Can you briefly tell me about your athletic career?
 - a. Career development as an athlete (transitions to higher levels, achievements)
 - b. Experiences as a first year athlete in university, or other settings
2. How did you get involved in coaching and what paid jobs did you hold before previously?

Key Questions

3. What are some common characteristics of first year student-athletes?
 - a. Struggles, in and out of sport
 - b. Effect of distance from home
 - c. Those who drop out
4. What do you look for when you recruit first year student-athletes (or select players in tryouts)?
 - a. Athletically
 - b. Academically
 - c. Socially, with your team
 - d. Role on the team
5. What adjustments do you make when coaching first year student-athletes?
 - a. Based on athlete preferences
 - b. Based on athlete requirements
(e.g., adjusting to university academically, being away from home etc.)
 - c. based on team needs?
 - d. based on athlete performance?
 - e. example of athletes who adjusted well vs. not well?

6. How does coaching first year student-athletes differ from coaching senior, experienced athletes?

- a. Organization (seasonal plans, player selection, preparing practices, injuries)
- b. Training (instructions, giving feedback, intervention styles)
- c. Competition (pre-game preparation, playing time)
- d. Coach-athlete relationship

7. Is there anything that you have changed in coaching first year athletes over the years? If so, why?

- a. views, leadership styles, and behaviours

Concluding Question

8. Are there any questions or comments you would like to share?

- Thank participant

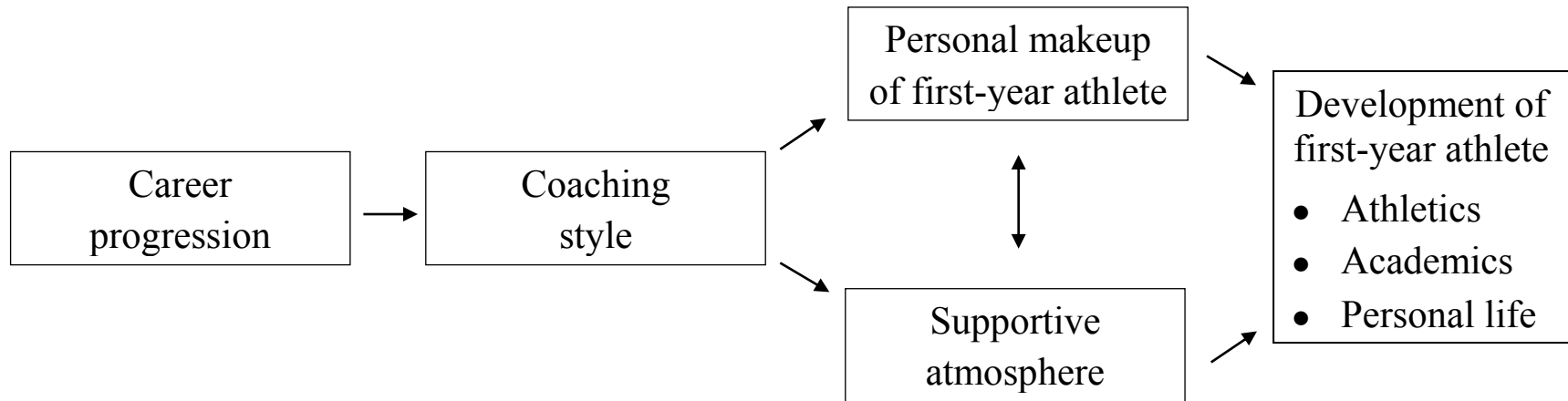


Figure 1. Flowchart of themes for coaching first-year university athletes.