EXPLORING HOW EXPERIENCED TENNIS COACHES DEVELOPED HIGH-QUALITY

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR ELITE YOUTH SPORT ATHLETES

Mikaela (Mishi) Papich

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Abstract

Successful coach-athlete relationships contribute to an athlete's positive personal, emotional, and performance development. In order to foster successful dyadic relationships, coaches need well-developed interpersonal skills allowing them to connect to their athletes. These skills allow coaches to continuously adapt themselves to and find the most effective ways of communicating with and motivating their athlete. Despite the importance of successful coach-athlete relationships, it remains unclear *how* coaches build and maintain successful coach-athlete relationships within dynamic sporting environments. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how tennis coaches developed high-quality relationships with their athletes. Five elite tennis coaches were purposefully recruited based on the recommendation of Tennis Canada. Data were collected through two semi-structured interviews and three story completion tasks. A thematic analysis was used to generate themes across the semi-structured interviews and story-completion tasks. Results outlined that coaches built successful relationships with their athletes using an athlete-centered coaching philosophy, placing importance on the development of well-rounded human beings. Coaches believed learning to understand each athlete was at the center of building close relationships. In order to understand their athlete, coaches prioritized spending quality time with them and involving parents in their tennis journeys to ensure the athlete received appropriate support on, as well as off court. Additionally, it appeared that coaches used the skills of emotional intelligence to effectively manage their athlete, their parents, and their own emotions to improve the coach-athlete relationship. These findings provide detailed insight into how coaches can build a unique relationship with each athlete that continuously meets their evolving needs. Overall, these findings can provide high performance coaches and coach education programs with important knowledge on how to develop a deep understanding and strong connection with athletes.

Résumé

Une bonne relation entre un entraîneur et son athlète permet à l'athlète d'avoir une performance positive. Afin de favoriser des relations dyadiques fructueuses, les entraîneurs ont besoin de compétences interpersonnelles bien développées. Celles-ci leur permettant ainsi de comprendre les besoins de leur athlète et de trouver les moyens les plus efficaces de communiquer avec eux. Le but de cette étude est d'examiner le cheminement et le maintien des relations entraîneurs-athlètes. Cinq entraîneurs de niveau élite ont été recrutés sur une base volontaire et sur recommandation de Tennis Canada. Les données ont été recueillies au moyen de deux entretiens semi-structurés et de trois tâches de rédaction d'histoires. Une analyse thématique des données a montré que les entraîneurs établissent des relations fructueuses avec leurs athlètes en utilisant une philosophie d'entraînement centrée sur l'athlète, en mettant l'accent sur son développement équilibré. Les entraîneurs étaient d'avis que d'apprendre à connaitre et à comprendre l'athlète était au centre de l'établissement de relations étroites. Les entraîneurs privilégiaient des entretiens de qualité avec leur athlète et l'implication des parents afin d'assurer un support adéquat. Les entraîneurs ont pu établir les besoins sportifs et émotionnels de leur athlète et ont ajusté leurs approches interpersonnelles en conséquence. De plus, il est apparu que les entraîneurs utilisaient des compétences d'intelligence émotionnelle pour gérer efficacement les athlètes, leurs parents et leurs propres émotions afin d'améliorer la relation entraîneur-athlète. Les résultats de cette étude fournissent un aperçu détaillé de la façon dont les entraîneurs peuvent établir une relation unique avec chaque athlète en répondant continuellement à leurs besoins changeants. Dans l'ensemble, les résultats peuvent fournir d'importantes connaissances pour les programmes de formation d'entraîneurs.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In September 2019, Bianca Andreescu became the first Canadian tennis player to win a Grand Slam title (Tennis Canada, 2019). Her athletic abilities and relentless desire to win were evident throughout the tournament, leading up to her final match against 23-time Grand Slam champion, Serena Williams. In addition to her exceptional skills and mental toughness, part of Andreescu's success can undoubtedly be attributed to the strong relationship with her coach Sylvain Bruneau (Hinkson, 2019). A month after Andreescu's historic win, Bruneau received the Jack Donohue Coach of the Year Award. This award is given to a Canadian coach who has made outstanding contributions to sport coaching and who displays honesty, integrity, competitiveness, positive attitude, and a love for sport (Tennis Canada, 2019). Upon receiving the award, Bruneau explained that "I started to be a little bit more understanding. I think that communication is the key. I learned over the years to listen to my players and to adapt my coaching based on what they say or feel" (WTA, 2019).

The personal connection between Andreescu and Bruneau is one of many examples of a coach playing an instrumental role in helping an athlete achieve performance success (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). Due to the importance of this relationship, some conceptual models of coaching have been created (i.e., Chelladurai, 2007; Jowett, 2005; Lyle, 2002; Smoll & Smith, 2002; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). These models were derived from theories within leadership, expertise, motivation, and education (Côté & Gilbert, 2009) and were designed to explain athlete and team success. Despite these conceptual advancements, a definition encapsulating the specific processes, knowledge, and behaviours of effective coaching was missing. Consequently, Côté and Gilbert (2009) proposed an integrative definition of coaching effectiveness that encompassed

the components of coaches' knowledge, athletes' outcomes, and coaching contexts. This definition has provided researchers with a framework to study the skills implemented by effective coaches across a variety of coaching contexts.

According to Gilbert and Côté (2013), the literature had provided in-depth discussions on athlete outcomes (Côté et al., 2010; Côté & Gilbert 2009) and coaching contexts (Lyle & Cushion 2010; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). To fully understand the integrative definition of coaching effectiveness, Gilbert and Côté (2013) provided a similar discussion of the three forms of coaches' knowledge: professional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. *Interpersonal knowledge* looks at ways to build and maintain relationships in the sporting environment. More specifically, according to Jowett and Shanmugam (2016), the interpersonal connection built between a coach and athlete lies at the heart of effective/successful coaching.

The coach-athlete relationship has been conceptualized as "a situation in which coaches' and athletes' feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are interdependent" (Jowett, 2007, p. 17). Jowett and colleagues interviewed hundreds of coaches and athletes from a variety of sports, and collected quantitative data to explore participant thoughts about the relationship, to determine the necessary ingredients or characteristics, and to determine the value of this relationship for skill development, performance, psychosocial development, and well-being (e.g., Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Frost, 2007; Jowett & Meek 2000). As a result, Jowett and colleagues identified the four properties of Closeness, Commitment, Complementarity, and Co-orientation to define the quality of the relationship (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). In order to measure the quality of the relationship, Jowett and colleagues created the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) which measures the coach and athlete's' emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, as well as their interdependency (Jowett, 2006). Ultimately, when the

relationship quality is high, the process of coaching benefits as the relationship contains mutual

respect, trust, and appreciation, which are crucial for desired sport outcomes (Jowett,

2017). Additionally, higher quality relationships are associated with athlete satisfaction and

performance outcomes (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). Several researchers have also suggested

that the interpersonal dynamics between a coach and athlete are quite different in team and

individual sport (Baker et al., 2003; Jowett et al., 2005; Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996).

In order to examine the differences in these interpersonal dynamics, Rhind et al. (2012)

explored how team sport and individual sport athletes perceived their relationship with their

coach. The authors found that athletes in individual sports felt closer and more committed to

their coach than athletes in team sports. Rhind and colleagues (2012) suggested that athletes in

team sports viewed their relationship with their coach as less interdependent. Further to this,

Prapavessis and Gordon (1991) examined compatibility between elite Canadian coach/player

dyads in tennis. Among their findings, incompatibility resulted from coaches who displayed

more autocratic behaviour where the athletes preferred that their coaches allowed them to make

decisions and express their opinions regarding their tennis development. Based on these findings,

the compatibility between a coach and tennis player will benefit when there is greater

communication and will contribute to a stronger relationship between the two members. Taken

together, these studies suggested that the different interpersonal dynamics between a coach and

athlete across sport type can influence how these dyadic relationships unfold. Additionally, the

relationship quality in individual sports may be influenced by how a coach adapts to each

athlete's needs regardless of the specific sport.

In addition to sport type, an athlete's age can also influence how these dyadic

relationships unfold, particularly within the youth sport context, where athletes are between 7-18

years old and are navigating the challenges of their sport, school, and personal lives (Bloom et al., 2020). As such, coaches can provide an environment that fosters Positive Youth Development (PYD) by instilling young athletes with the knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences to successfully transition into adulthood (Schulman & Davies, 2007). However, as elite youth sport is characterized by high expectations, considerable time demands, and an emphasis on performance (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015), researchers have suggested that it may not offer the optimal climate for PYD (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Harwood & Johnston, 2016). Since coaches can foster PYD through the relationships they create with their athletes (Holt et al., 2017), it is useful to consider the age of the athlete to understand what other challenges they may be experiencing.

Taken together, the interpersonal coaching process is a challenging task as it requires coaches to adapt to each situation and find the most effective ways of communicating with and motivating their athletes. Gilbert and Côté (2013) have suggested that the concept of emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) could be used to capture the interpersonal knowledge of understanding and creating a bond with an athlete. Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive and identify emotions in oneself and in others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Once an emotion is identified, the skills of EI involve using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding the meaning behind emotions, and managing one's own emotions and those of others. In order to effectively manage interactions between a coach and athlete, a coach requires the interpersonal skills to recognize their athlete's' emotions and subsequently regulate their own behaviours. Some researchers have suggested the importance and usefulness of EI in effective coaching and managing these interactions (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Heelis et al., 2020; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Thelwell et al., 2011). However, according to Laborde et al. (2016), few if any studies

have explored how EI influences the coach-athlete relationship. Since effective coaches must respond to the ever-changing needs of their athletes and build effective, working relationships with them, we sought to explore how coaches build relationships with their athletes through interpersonal skills and the skills of EI.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of how tennis coaches develop high quality relationships through interpersonal skills and EI. The purpose of this study was guided by the following questions:

1. What strategies do tennis coaches employ to build strong relationships with their athletes?

2. How do tennis coaches build strong relationships with athletes who have different levels of academic, social, and athletic achievements and goals?

3. Do tennis coaches demonstrate care and respect towards their athletes' athletic, as well as personal and emotional success?

Significance of the Study

The goal of this study was to contribute to the existing literature on coach-athlete relationships in individual sport. This two-person relationship is a highly interdependent process and requires a great amount of time and effort from both relationship members. Coach-athlete relationships are also context-dependent and researchers have identified a need to explore how sport type can influence this two-person relationship (Jowett, 2017; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Rhind et al., 2012). Consequently, we explored what strategies tennis coaches used to connect to their players and what sorts of challenges they encountered to provide a greater understanding of how coaches established these relationships. Additionally, since youth athletes are dealing with a

host of academic, social, and sport-related stressors, we intended to identify what interpersonal skills coaches used to manage interactions with their athletes. Ultimately, this information can be useful for Canadian tennis coaches who wish to work towards fostering better relationships with their athletes. Since there are a variety of positive outcomes associated with good quality coach-athlete relationships, the findings from this study may help coaches create better relationships with their athletes and consequently contribute to greater satisfaction and performance in their tennis players.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were identified for the current study:

1. Participants were currently coaching nationally ranked Canadian tennis players aged 14-18 years old.

2. Participants had a minimum of five years of experience coaching nationally ranked tennis players.

3. Participants were currently holding a full-time coaching position at the host tennis club.

4. Participants were either male or female over the age of 30.

Limitations

Based on the delimitations of this study, the following limitations were identified:

1. The results may only be applicable to elite individual sport coaches.

2. The results were only representative of the perceptions and experiences of coaches and not those of their athletes and their parents.

3. The results were limited by the coaches' abilities to recall details about their experiences.

Operational Definitions:

Following the purpose of the research, the following definitions were used:

Coaching Effectiveness. The integrative definition of coaching effectiveness identifies three types of knowledge: professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge. Coaches apply this knowledge across coaching contexts in order to improve athlete's competence, confidence, connection, and character (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

Coach-Athlete Relationship. The interpersonal dyadic relationship between a coach and athlete has been conceptualized as "a situation in which coaches' and athletes' feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are interdependent" (Jowett, 2007, p. 17).

Emotional Intelligence. Emotional intelligence is "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Coaching Effectiveness

According to Erickson and Côté (2013), the coaching process has been oversimplified as a one-way process where the coach actively behaves in a specific way and the athlete passively internalizes and experiences these behaviours. However, it is more accurate to explain this coaching process as multidirectional where the coaches' and athletes' behaviours, actions, and cognitions mutually affect one another (Erickson & Côté, 2013; Jones et al., 2010). Erickson and Côté (2013) stated: "not only do these actions change and evolve to fit the dynamic requirements of the specific context, but they also unfold over time as preceding events influence subsequent events" (p. 110). Within the sporting context, athletes face different opponents, experience unexpected injuries/pain, and are confronted with social/academic conflicts, among other unplanned obstacles. Therefore, coaches are required to adapt their training programs and communication styles in response to these unpredictable challenges to bring the best out of their players. Interestingly, a coach's main goal is to produce consistent results by tailoring the practice and competitive environment to accommodate for athletes' specific needs (Erickson & Côté, 2013). Thus, the coaching process cannot be properly explored without considering the multi-directional, ever-changing, and interactive nature of this dyadic relationship (Bowes & Jones, 2006; Erickson & Côté, 2013; Jowett, 2017).

Due to the complex nature of the coaching process, researchers have attempted to identify the necessary characteristics to be a good coach. Research on coaching has produced a variety of conceptual models that have focused on theories within "leadership, expertise, coach-athlete relationships, motivation, and education" (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 308). Although these

coaching models have advanced research in coaching science, a definition of coaching effectiveness that encapsulated the necessary coaching knowledge and behaviours to develop successful athletes was missing. To that end, the integrative definition of coaching effectiveness has been defined as: "the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts" (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 316). Thus, an athlete's performance and personal satisfaction in sport relies on the coach to possess the pedagogical knowledge of being a good coach, the ability to build strong relationships, and the ability to know when to use specific practices in different situations (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

Coaches' Knowledge*. Abraham et al. (2006) created and validated a coaching schematic that operationalizes coaching knowledge and includes both declarative and procedural knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). This schematic was created based on research in coaching, sports science, pedagogy, and cognitive psychology (Abraham et al., 2006). Declarative knowledge consists of the facts and concepts about a particular topic. Within coaching, this includes knowledge in sport science and sport-specific knowledge. Secondly, procedural knowledge includes the instructions and steps required to perform a specific task in sport (Anderson, 1982). For example, in order to teach a tennis player how to hit a forehand, a coach must be able to indicate step-by-step guidance for proper body positioning, grip, racket placement, racket acceleration, racket follow through, and weight transfer.

Professional knowledge includes the pedagogical content knowledge of the sport and how to teach sport-specific skills (Gilbert & Côté, 2013). This knowledge is considered the "how to" of coaching. However, Côté and Gilbert (2009) propose that coaches need a lot more than just professional knowledge to become effective coaches. Professional knowledge on its own

does not account for the many other variables that influence the coaching process. "Exposure to professional knowledge out of context loses its relevance and minimizes the importance of the reflective and complex interactional nature of effective coaching" (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 310). Consequently, there are two other types of knowledge within the integrative definition of coaching effectiveness: interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

In addition to possessing sport-specific knowledge, coaches are also required to build strong relationships with players, other coaches, parents, administrators, and officials (Bloom et al., 2014). The interactions within the coaching process are dynamic and interdependent on the people within the environment. Thus, *interpersonal* knowledge is another component of coaching effectiveness, and focuses primarily on how to connect with other individuals in the sporting environment. Coaches must adapt to different personalities and changing emotions in order to build strong relationships and lead athletes to success (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). In fact, coaches who have greater interpersonal skills are better at communicating with players of all ages, backgrounds, and competitive levels (Bloom et al., 2014).

It is important that coaches continuously work to improve these interpersonal skills to build strong relationships with players of different ages, competitive levels, and personalities (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Since every athlete has varying needs, goals, and expectations, it is important that coaches recognize these differences and find ways to relate to each athlete on an individual level (Becker, 2013; Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Typically, effective coaches do not consider having to recognize, understand, and accommodate to athletes' individual needs as a barrier toward achieving success, whereas their less effective coaches tend to complain about the difficulty associated with this task (Becker, 2013). Further, as athletes develop and mature, their interests and needs change. Thus, an effective coach recognizes these changes and finds ways to

communicate and relate to their players on an individual and personal level (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

A final form of knowledge within Côté and Gilbert's (2009) definition of coaching effectiveness is *intrapersonal* knowledge, which is the ability to understand oneself and learn from past experiences. The development of intrapersonal knowledge is generally contingent on a coach's ability to be reflective within his/her own coaching practices (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Reflection requires revisiting and reviewing previous decisions to determine if they were effective or not (Bloom et al., 2014; té & Gilbert, 2009). It also demands self-awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Additionally, a coach must internalize this information and make an effort to utilize and harness strengths as well as address their weaknesses (Gilbert & Côté, 2013). Werthner and Trudel (2006) referred to coach reflection as an internal learning situation. Thus, it is imperative that coaches are willing to continuously reflect on their past success and failures within their coaching practices.

Athletes' Outcomes. A second component of effective coaching is athletes' outcomes. Effective coaching increases sport performance (i.e., win-loss ratio, player development) as well as positive psychological responses for each athlete (Becker, 2013; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Horn, 2008). Within the coaching effectiveness definition, there are four athlete outcomes (4Cs): competence, confidence, connection, and character (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). *Competence* refers to an athlete's technical and tactical skills, sport performance, health and fitness, and training habits. *Confidence* refers to an athlete's perception of his/her own abilities and whether they will lead to success. *Connection* is the social aspect of sport and refers to how an athlete relates to individuals within and outside of sport. Lastly, an athlete's *character* can be measured by their morality and integrity within sport and towards others. Someone who is honest and empathetic

would be said to have good character. It is important that coaches create a learning environment where athletes feel both their psychological and athletic needs are being met (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Jowett, 2017). Effective coaches are able to influence these four athlete outcomes by implementing a mix of professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge within the dynamic sporting environment.

Coaching Contexts. The final component of the integrative definition of coaching effectiveness is coaching context, defined as the "unique settings in which coaches endeavor to improve athlete outcomes" (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 315). Trudel and Gilbert (2006) proposed three coaching contexts: recreational, developmental, and elite sport. Lyle (2002) noted that this can be further broken down into two types of sport coaching: participation and performance. Participation coaching focuses on the enjoyment of sport and the health benefits ensued from participation. Competition coaching focuses on preparing athletes to compete at a high level and on increasing performance success. The performance demands of the sport coaching context as well as the developmental level of the athlete will influence the specific wants and needs of the athlete. For example, a coach requires different knowledge and expertise to teach a recreational 10-year-old soccer player compared to a nationally ranked, 20-year-old soccer player. The required pedagogical knowledge, relationship skills, and ability to be reflective in one's own practices to develop each athlete's 4Cs depends largely on the coaching context (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Ultimately, it is the coach's responsibility to recognize the unique needs and goals of each athlete within the coaching context in order to be an effective coach.

In conclusion, the coaching process is much more elaborate than a coach possessing the pedagogical knowledge to teach the technical and tactical skills of the sport. There are a range of other valuable skills involved in understanding each player and their individual needs. As central

contributors to an athlete's performance and satisfaction in sport, Côté and Gilbert (2009) believe that coaching effectiveness is best understood when a coach's knowledge, the athlete's outcomes, and the coaching context are considered. An effective coach learns to understand each player and recognizes when they are acting out of character. Further, they must be willing to tailor a practice to meet the specific needs of their player within each unique situation. Consequently, effective coaches require a variety of skills ranging from teaching abilities to building strong relationships with their players that center on mutual trust and respect. Côté and Gilbert (2009) recognize that each relationship between a coach and athlete is unique and operates within its own specific coaching context. Given the coaching process is multi-directional and ever-changing, the definition of coaching effectiveness provides a general framework to work with, but each relationship between a coach and athlete will require different skills based on their individual's needs (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

The Coach-Athlete Relationship

Coaching is an interpersonal process that involves far more than simply teaching the technical, tactical, and physical skills to perform in sport. Early research indicated that the interpersonal, dyadic relationship between a coach and athlete was crucial to athlete satisfaction and performance (Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Butler, 1997; Chelladurai, 1990; Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996; Smith & Smoll, 1996; Vealey et al., 1998). According to Jowett and Meek (2000), "the extent to which the coach and athlete influence one another, and consequently performance and participation in general are fundamental issues to the coaching process" (p. 157). Despite the significance of the relationship formed between a coach and athlete, Wylleman (2000) stated that the study of relationships in sport and exercise settings was an "uncharted territory." Up until this point, there remained a lack of a theoretical framework that captured the

coach-athlete relationship. Consequently, Jowett and colleagues conducted a series of qualitative

case studies to determine the nature and content of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2003;

Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000). These researchers relied on the available

literature in interpersonal concepts and theories, including Kelley and colleagues' (1983)

definition of interpersonal relationships: the situation in which two people's emotions, thoughts,

and behaviours are mutually and causally interconnected.

The preliminary qualitative case studies provided descriptive information on how coaches

and athletes built effective, interpersonal relationships (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003;

Jowett & Meek, 2000). Further, according to Jowett and Cockerill (2003), these initial studies

highlighted the need for coaches to possess the social skills, as well as the pedagogical

knowledge of the sport to create good connections with their athletes. Building off of Kelley et

al.'s (1983) definition of interpersonal relationships, Jowett (2007) defined the coach-athlete

relationship as: "a situation in which coaches' and athletes' feelings, thoughts, and behaviours

are interdependent" (p. 17). This definition identifies the three constituents of this relationship:

emotions, thoughts, and behaviours - as well as their interrelations (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003).

Using the detailed interviews in the initial case studies, Jowett and colleagues created a

conceptual model for this dyadic relationship.

3 + 1 C's Model. Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) developed and validated the Coach-

Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) to measure the emotions, thoughts, and

behaviours within the coach-athlete relationship. Initially the CART-Q measured Closeness,

Commitment, and Complementarity to measure the affective, cognitive, and behavioural bond

respectively (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). Co-orientation was later added to effectively capture

the interdependency between the coach and athlete's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours (Jowett,

2006). *Closeness* refers to the affective bond between the coach and athlete and requires mutual trust, respect, appreciation, and liking (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Lorimer & Jowett, 2013). *Commitment* refers to the cognitive element of the model and reflects the willingness to work together and maintain a strong working relationship over an extended period of time (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). *Complementarity* is the behavioural component, and it refers to the cooperative interactions between the coach and athlete (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). In order to have high complementarity, the coach and athlete should have clearly established goals and they should behave in a supportive and encouraging way (Rhind, et al., 2012). *Co-orientation* (Jowett, 2007) measures the degree to which the coach and athlete's feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are interdependent, and whether the coach and athlete are on the same page about their partnership. More specifically, co-orientation measures three elements: assumed similarity, actual similarity, and empathic understanding (Jowett, 2007). Assumed similarity refers to the degree to which one assumes their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours are shared by the other person. Actual similarity refers to the degree to which the emotions, thoughts, and behaviours are actually shared between the coach and athlete. Lastly, empathic understanding refers to the ability of each relationship member to understand the other person's feelings, thoughts, and behaviours (Jowett, 2007). Taken together, co-orientation provides an understanding of the influence that the two relationship members exert on one another (Jowett, 2007). Despite the ongoing changes occurring in the sporting environment, the 3 + 1 C's model provides a framework for researchers to study the coach-athlete relationship across various sport types and situations.

A coach and athlete who have high levels of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation are said to have a higher quality relationship, which is instrumental to

performance success and well-being (Jowett, 2017). In fact, the quality of the coach-athlete relationship has been associated with increased or enhanced athlete motivation (Adie & Jowett, 2010; Riley & Smith, 2011), passion (Lafrenière et al., 2011), performance (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003), communication (Rhind & Jowett, 2011), and psychological well-being (Felton & Jowett, 2013). Interestingly, Lyle and Cushion (2010) stated that the coaching process was best understood when the athlete's sporting domain was considered. Each personal relationship is context-dependent as each sporting domain creates its own coaching responsibilities and athlete requirements that influence the way in which coaches and athletes interact. To that end, many researchers have indicated a need to explore how sport type influences the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2017; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Rhind et al., 2012).

      Individual Sport. Several researchers have indicated that the type of sport (individual vs. team) is likely to affect the interpersonal dynamics between a coach and athlete (Bloom et al., 1998; Chelladurai, 1993; Jowett et al., 2017; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Rhind et al., 2012; Smith & Smoll, 2007). More specifically, there is a greater opportunity for a coach to address an athlete one-on-one in individual sport settings (Baker et al., 2003; Jowett et al., 2005; Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996). Taking a closer look at these differences, Rhind et al. (2012) recruited 199 athletes from team sports and 500 athletes from individual sports. Each athlete completed the CART-Q to measure the quality of the relationship. The results indicated that closeness, commitment, and complementarity were correlated for athletes in team sports compared to individual sports. Athletes in individual sport however, felt closer and more committed to their coaches, reporting higher levels of trust, respect, and appreciation from their coaches. The authors suggested that these differences may indicate that athletes in team sports viewed their relationship with their coach as less interdependent than athletes in individual sports (Rhind et

al., 2012). For example, while athletes in team sports must build relationships with their team members and their coach(es), athletes in individual sports only build a relationship with their coach. As a result, coaches in individual sport develop a unique relationship with each of their athletes, providing a greater opportunity for coaches and athletes to develop shared emotions, thoughts, and behaviours (Rhind et al., 2012).

Since the interactions between a coach and athlete have a profound effect on the quality of the relationship, it can be helpful to consider both the coach and athlete's perspective on the relationship. To that end, Trzaskoma-Bicsérdy and colleagues (2007) applied Jowett and Meek's (2000) original coach-athlete relationship model to explore relationship quality between successful Hungarian coaches and athletes in individual sports. Coaches and athletes were purposefully recruited to ensure they were internationally recognized for their achievements. The participant coaches and athletes were from three individual sports: kayaking, swimming, and wrestling. The results demonstrated that the most important emotional factors for a successful, cooperative relationship were respect, belief, intimacy, trust, commitment, and expectation (Trzaskoma-Bicsérdy et al., 2007). Both coaches and athletes also indicated the importance of having regular, two-way communication to better understand each other. Additionally, the relationships also required constant feedback and support both during and after training sessions. Coaches explained that they expected their athletes to display high levels of intrinsic motivation, but understood that sometimes athletes felt unsupported and discouraged, and did not want to practice. Coaches added that it was important to recognize when these personal problems arose so they could address them to help the athlete regain motivation. Overall, the coach-athlete relationships were based more on the specific characteristics and needs of each athlete than the characteristics of each individual-sport discipline (Trzaskoma-Bicsérdy et al., 2007). Although

each of the three individual sport types provided a unique setting with its own preferred

leadership and communication styles, the most important aspect of each interpersonal dyad

remained how the coach recognized and adapted to their athletes' specific needs (Trzaskoma-

Bicsérdy et al., 2007).

      Although these dyadic relationships operate in similar ways across all individual sport

types, it is also important to recognize that each sporting domain creates its own unique setting

for these relationships to unfold. Tennis is an individual sport that has received attention within

the sport psychology literature (Barling & Abel, 1983; Dohme et al., 2020; Loehr, 1990; Loehr

& Striegel, 1994; Richardson, et al., 1988; Taylor, 1993; Weinberg, 1988). A few studies have

also examined the implementation and evaluation of mental skills training programs for tennis

players (Davis, 1991, 1992; Daw & Burton, 1994; Dohme et al., 2019; Gould, Damarjian et al.,

1999; Gould, Medbery et al., 1999; Lauer et al., 2020; Namassis & Doganis, 2004; Rolo et al.,

2001). In order to effectively implement these skills in training and in matches, it is crucial for

both coaches and athletes to understand what these skills are so they can effectively work

towards implementing them.

      These psychological skills can be useful for young athletes as they face the challenges of

coping with injuries and losses, as well as balancing sport, school, and their social lives.

Specifically, athletes who possess psychological skills and characteristics (PSCs) are better able

to negotiate these demands and stressors (Henriksen et al., 2010) and are less likely to experience

burnout (Gould & Carson, 2008). To that end, Dohme and colleagues (2019) created,

implemented, and evaluated a Mental Skills Training (MST) program for elite, youth tennis

players in the UK. The program effectively taught the athletes to use and regulate various

psychological skills (self-talk, imagery, and performance routines) and characteristics (focus and

emotional control). One of the assets of the MST program was that the researcher built an authentic relationship with the coach and each athlete, allowing for a more precise understanding of the athletes' psychological needs. Since these tennis players worked closely with their coaches, the ability to work with both relationship members provided the researcher with meaningful content to create the program, as well as a better understanding for how to constructively deliver the content to the players. Both coaches and athletes benefitted from developing shared-subject specific language as it allowed the pairs to communicate more accurately and effectively. More specifically, athletes and coaches admitted that this granted more honest and frequent conversations about PSCs (Dohme et al., 2019). Ultimately the MST program was based on the specific needs of each athlete as it took both the athlete and coaches input into consideration. Despite the breadth of research in tennis, the strategies and precise ways in which tennis coaches build good quality relationships with their athletes needs to be further explored.

Prior to the conceptualization of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2006), Prapavessis and Gordon (1991) examined fifty-two Canadian coach/player relationships in tennis, looking specifically at athletes between 12-25 years old and their coaches. In order to determine each dyad's compatibility, the study compared an athlete's expressed interpersonal needs (inclusion, control, and affection) to whether or not the coach was attending to those specific needs. Secondly, the athletes' and coaches' preferred ways of interacting were compared by assessing the preferred, perceived, and actual coaching behaviours presented. Lastly, five dimensions of coaching behaviour were examined through the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS): training and instruction, democratic, autocratic, social support, and rewarding behaviour. The results indicated that the best predictor of coach/athlete compatibility was the discrepancy scores

between the *preferred* coaching behaviours and the *perceived* coaching behaviours, accounting

for 40% of the variance. These results implied that athletes were better at assessing their

relationship with their coach than vice versa. The authors believed that this was likely a result of

coaches having to deal with multiple players, whereas athletes only had one coach, giving them

the ability to perceive their relationship more accurately (Prapavessis & Gordon, 1991). Results

also indicated that autocratic behaviour displayed by coaches was negatively associated with

coach/athlete compatibility. Athletes preferred when their coaches encouraged them to make

their own decisions and when their coaches valued their opinions and thoughts on their athletic

development. Ultimately, a tennis coach and player's partnership will benefit more when a coach

communicates with his/her player to understand their specific needs and allows the athlete to

provide input on their tennis success.

In conclusion, a coach plays one of the most central roles in an athlete's development by

transferring the necessary skills, techniques, strategies, and tactics to perform in their respective

sport (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013). However, one of the most important requirements of successful

coaching is the ability to recognize and respond to the ever-changing needs of athletes (Lorimer

& Jowett, 2013). In order to do so, coaches must take the time to build successful working

relationships with each of their athletes. These high-quality relationships require a tremendous

amount of effort as they are "difficult to manage and as complex to understand as the people

concerned" (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016, p. 472). Studying the coach-athlete relationship within

the individual sport setting provides valuable information for how the two relationship members

form a strong bond within the sporting environment. Without the presence of other teammates

and coaches, this dyad functions in a bi-directional manner and is associated with many positive

outcomes. With a lack of research on the coach-athlete relationship in tennis, this information

may be helpful for Canadian tennis coaches who wish to create and maintain a strong, interpersonal relationship with their players. As coaches work towards creating these strong connections, they must also recognize that an athlete's emotions can be just as volatile as the complex sporting environment in which they are participating in. Not only does this dyad benefit from developing shared thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, it also benefits from learning to understand and appropriately respond to one another in any given moment (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013). Ultimately, coaches who are better at recognizing, understanding, and responding to these emotional changes are going to create stronger relationships and interact more effectively with their players.

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

EI represents a set of abilities that involves the interaction between emotions and intelligence to enhance thought and reasoning (Matthews et al., 2004; Mayer, 2000; Mayer et al., 2000; Oatley, 2004). As emotions emerge, changes occur within one's physiology, motor abilities, behaviour, cognition, and subjective experience. For example, when an individual feels happy, he/she is likely to experience lower blood pressure and heart rate, greater motor readiness, and a greater willingness to approach others (Mayer et al., 2008). Ultimately, emotional information holds a powerful influence on one's behaviours, thinking, reasoning, and ability to problem solve. As scholars recognized the importance of EI, there continued to be a lack of agreement on how EI could be tested and measured (Bar-On, 1997; Elias et al., 1997; Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey 1993; Picard, 1997). Although there is disagreement on how to conceptualize and measure EI, it is agreed among scholars that EI involves the four skills of perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer 1990).

According to Gilbert and Côté (2013), EI helps to capture a coach's interpersonal knowledge to understand and connect to each athlete. In line with Gilbert and Côté's (2013) suggestion, several researchers have called for a more advanced understanding of the significance of EI in the sport domain (Botterill & Brown, 2002; McCann, 1999; Zizzi et al., 2003). Most research on EI has focused on the business and academic world and has relied on two models: the mixed model and the ability model. The mixed model's approach has been criticized for being indistinguishable from personality measures (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Conte, 2005; Grubb & McDaniel, 2007) and lacking a primary focus to measuring EI (Mayer et al., 2008). Consequently, the ability model offers a more concrete conceptualization.

Ability Model. According to the ability model, EI is "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). This model posits that EI consists of four skills that can be learned and developed over time: perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions (Mayer et al., 2003; Mayer & Salovey, 1995, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). *Perceiving emotions* requires the ability to perceive and identify one's own emotions and the emotions of others. It is the foundational skill of EI as individuals cannot use, understand, or manage emotions if they cannot identify them first (Duncan, et al., 2014). *Using emotions* requires the ability to use emotions to direct attention towards relevant cues and generate emotions that facilitate "reasoning, problem-solving, decision-making, and interpersonal communication" (Brackett & Salovey, 2006, p. 35). *Understanding emotions* in oneself and others requires the ability to recognize the causes and consequences of emotions (Brackett & Salovey, 2006). Lastly, *managing emotions* is the skill of regulating one's moods and emotions and those of others. This skill requires the ability to recognize emotions,

implement strategies to improve or maintain them, and then measure the effectiveness of those

strategies (Brackett & Salovey, 2006). According to Gilbert and Côté (2013), a coach who learns

to employ these four skills may be better at teaching their athlete how to properly respond to

emotionally charged situations and be better at regulating their own emotions during difficult or

frustrating situations. Additionally, a coach who can use emotions to facilitate thought and who

can manage his/her own emotions and behaviours will largely benefit the way the two

relationship members interact. As coaches and athletes' emotions, thoughts, and behaviours are

highly interdependent, coaches who possess the skills of EI may be able to create closer

relationships. Finally, Meyer and Fletcher (2007) noted that the ability model may be the more

fitting model to use in sport psychology research as it effectively measures the four abilities of EI

(Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Sport Studies Using EI. Gilbert and Côté (2013) suggested that Mayer and Salovey's

(1997) conceptualization of EI may be used to explain how coaches recognize and manage

emotions to manage their relationships. The EI skills may allow coaches to interact with and

motivate their athletes more effectively, as well as plan and make constructive decisions. In fact,

Chan and Mallett (2011) provided a variety of hypothetical examples for the application of EI in

coaching practices. For example, a soccer team was expected to win their first game of a

tournament, which would have ranked them highly within their pool. However, late in the fourth

quarter, the goalkeeper made an unfortunate mistake that cost them the game. The player felt

devastated and angry at himself for letting the team down, his teammates were frustrated with

him, and the crowd was derisively chanting his name. The coach encouraged his players to draw

on the positivity and lessons learned throughout the tournament, as well as their developed

shared purpose. As the team continued to cool down, the coach quietly approached the

goalkeeper, sat next to him, and told him that when he was ready to talk, his office door was always open. This anecdote provided insight into how coaches can manage the complex interpersonal relations between athletes and teammates through the skills of EI. Ultimately, coaches who use the skills of EI are able to perceive and understand the cause of emotions, recognize the emotional climate, understand how emotions contribute to thinking, use positive memories to encourage positive emotions, manage unhelpful emotions in oneself and in others, and respond appropriately. To that end, the authors suggested that coaches or leaders who have low EI will lack interpersonal skills and the ability to create trustworthy and inspiring relationships with the individuals they work with (Chan & Mallett, 2011).

In an attempt to understand research on EI in sport, Laborde et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review of the available literature assessing EI within the sport and physical activity context. Thirty-six empirical studies were identified, only three of which explored EI in coaching (Hwang et al., 2013; Magyar et al., 2007; Thelwell et al., 2011). Hwang et al. (2013) recruited 323 high school basketball head coaches and measured their EI through the Modified Version Schutte's Emotional Intelligence Scale. The results indicated that coaches who were better at regulating their emotions and identifying the emotional states of their athletes were more likely to demonstrate positive feedback behaviour (providing encouragement to athletes after a mistake), situational consideration behaviours (choosing different coaching styles for different athlete skill levels), and training and instructional behaviour (behaviour used to improve athlete performance). These findings suggested that EI plays an important role in how coaches adapt constructively to the various demands of coaching. These results also paralleled the findings within organizational psychology (Caruso et al., 2002; Mayer & Caruso, 2002; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005) where leaders who possessed higher EI were more effective. Despite the

potential value of EI in managing the interpersonal aspects of coaching athletes, Laborde et al.

(2016) were unable to identify empirical studies that explored EI within the coach-athlete

relationship.

As coaches manage many relationships in the sporting environment, they often have to

make important decisions under pressure while attempting to satisfy multiple people. As they

reason through possible decisions and consider potential outcomes, they must also manage their

own emotions. To that end, two empirical studies have highlighted how coaches who applied EI

skills (perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions) better managed relationships

with their athletes (Heelis et al., 2020; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). For example, Mallett and

Lara-Bercial (2016) recruited 14 serial winning coaches who had won 128 gold medals and

major trophies, and were successful in a variety of contexts, having coached both men and

women in different leagues/countries. Coaches expressed that high levels of EI were needed to

adapt their behaviours to each individual athlete rather than treating every athlete the same.

Further, coaches expressed that EI allowed them to anticipate problems, improve relationship

building, and improve conflict management (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). These findings

support previous claims (Chan & Mallet, 2011; Gilbert & Côté, 2013) that effective coaches who

possess EI deal better with the interpersonal negotiations of high-performance sport coaching.

In a related manner, Heelis et al. (2020) interviewed eight Canadian Hockey League

coaches who had a minimum of 10 years of performance-coaching experience to gain insight

into how they managed difficult athletes. Past research indicated that coaches who dealt with

difficult athletes remained in control, engaged in self-reflection, and found effective ways to

communicate with each athlete (Wachsmuth et al., 2018). In accordance with these findings,

Heelis et al. (2020) found that coaches considered the individual factors (background/history of

each player), the social actors (parents and billets), coaching strategies, and the team's

environment when dealing with these athletes. The authors suggested that coaches who were

better at managing difficult athletes possessed higher levels of EI and were introspective within

their coaching practices.

In addition to the interpersonal skills required to coach athletes, coaches must also

possess the leadership qualities to guide, motivate, and lead athletes towards success. In an

attempt to gain a better understanding of how EI influences leadership in sport, Thelwell et al.

(2011) recruited 99 coaches from a variety of sports who had between 2 and 30 years of

coaching experience to explore the relationship between EI and coaching efficacy. An important

finding was that a coach's appraisal of their own emotions and appraisal of others' emotions was

significantly correlated with all four coaching efficacy subscales and overall coaching efficacy.

The authors suggested that these results indicated that a coach who was unable to appraise their

own emotions would not properly regulate their subsequent emotions and behaviours, hindering

their athlete's potential for learning and successful performance (Thelwell et al., 2011). The

authors concluded that researchers should begin to explore how coaches appraise their emotions

and the emotions of others, and how coaches regulate their emotions in sports. Despite the

scarcity of research on EI in the sport domain, there has been significant advancement of

research on EI in the academic and business setting. Due to the similarities in performance in

business and the sport domain, many have argued that the findings of EI in business may be

transferable to the sporting world (April et al., 2012; Jones, 2002; Loehr & Schwartz, 2001;

Weinberg & McDermott, 2002).

Non-Sport Studies Using EI. Researchers have noted that individuals in the

organizational setting who possessed higher levels of EI were better at coping with job-related

tension (Jordan et al., 2002), dealing with conflict resolution (Jordan et al., 2002; Jordan & Troth, 2002), and had improved work performance (Slaski & Cartwright, 2002, 2003). Consequently, the skills of EI may allow employees to manage the challenges and stressors of the competitive business environment. As parallels have also been drawn in the way coaches and business leaders lead and motivate their employees/athletes, researchers in the sport setting can learn from the available literature on EI and leadership within the organizational setting. To that end, the researchers have identified associations between EI and leadership quality (Palmer et al., 2001; Riggio & Reichard, 2008), EI and transformational leadership (Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000; Mills, 2009), emotions and leadership (Humphrey, 2002), and the effect a leader's emotions has on his/her followers (Barsade, 2002; Dasborough, 2006). Additionally, a few scholars suggested that EI is a valuable characteristic of effective leaders (Barling et al., 2000; Caruso et al., 2002; George, 2000). These findings suggested that EI plays a role in a high-performance business environment.

With respect to leadership and EI in business, Rosete and Ciarrochi (2005) studied 41 senior executives from an Australian Public Service organization. Participants were between the ages of 27 and 57 and had been working at the company for a minimum of 10 years. Each participant filled out the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) which measured all four branches of the ability model. Personality, cognitive ability, and leadership effectiveness were also measured. As expected, EI was positively correlated with leadership effectiveness and EI played an important role in how leaders created successful relationships in the workplace. These results provided evidence that EI was a better predictor for leadership effectiveness than personality and cognitive abilities. Although these results don't determine whether EI is an antecedent to effective leadership, perhaps EI is a developed ability that is

positively related to effective leadership despite one's predetermined personality and cognitive abilities.

Research on the academic setting has identified associations between EI, measured with the MSCEIT, and positive social relations in college students. For example, Lopes et al. (2003) recruited 103 college students from Yale University and measured their verbal intelligence, personality, social skills, mood, social desirability, and self-reported quality of interpersonal relationships. Individuals who scored higher in managing emotions reported more positive relations with others, greater parental support, and less conflictual and antagonistic relationships with close friends. Ultimately, the way students managed emotions contributed to perceived relationship quality with friends and parents. Although the sport setting differs from the workplace and the academic setting, EI appears to be beneficial for effective leadership and creating successful relationships in the business and academic world.

Chapter 3

Methods

Methodological coherence is essential for developing rigor in qualitative research (Poucher et al., 2020). It refers to the "congruence between your epistemological and ontological viewpoint, your theoretical position/perspective, the methods you choose and so on" (Mayan, 2009, p. 13). This chapter will begin by citing the researcher's philosophical assumptions, followed by the participants, and qualitative methods used to guide this study.

Philosophical Assumptions

A paradigm is a basic belief system and worldview that informs and guides the researcher's inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Each paradigm answers three fundamental questions that determine what falls within the limits of inquiry. First, the ontological question discusses the form and nature of reality, and what can be known of the world we live in. One's ontological position can fall somewhere between a realist and relativist position. The realist position assumes there is an external reality or truth existing independent of the researcher which can be studied objectively (Archer et al., 2016; Poucher et al., 2020; Wiltshire, 2018). On the other hand, a relativist position implies that reality is subjective and dependent on the individuals interpreting it (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln et al., 2018). Second, the epistemological question refers to the relationship between the knower and the inquirer and how knowledge is generated (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The epistemological position can fall between dualistic/objectivist and subjective/transactional. The dualistic/objectivistic position assumes the researcher can observe, measure, and assess a phenomenon objectively while placing little to no influence on the creation of results. Alternatively, the subjective/transactional position assumes that knowledge cannot be created free of the influence of one's prior experiences and information (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln et al., 2018). Finally, the methodological question

explores how the inquirer finds the answers to their research questions based on their ontological

and epistemological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). For example, someone conducting

research from the realist and dualist positioning will choose a methodology that controls for

confounding variables, while someone conducting research from the relativist and subjectivist

positioning will choose a methodology that explores the subjective experiences of others.

The current research project was conducted within the *constructivist paradigm* which

aligns with the *relativist* ontological assumption and the *subjective/transactional* epistemological

assumption (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The methodological assumption of constructivism is that

knowledge is co-constructed between inquirer and inquiry through transactions and a dialectical

context (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). It is assumed that all human constructions are inventions within

the human mind, influenced by various social, political, cultural, ethical, and gender factors.

Thus, no mental construction is considered to be more *right* than the other. The aim of inquiry

for constructivism is to understand and reconstruct mental constructions, aiming towards a

consensus, while recognizing that disagreement is likely to occur (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Throughout the hermeneutical/dialectical process, competing constructions are brought into

conversations, and the researcher must remain open to new interpretations. The researcher is said

to facilitate the process of shaping inquiry, whereby both the researcher and participant's mental

constructions are equally deserving of consideration. The researcher had 17 years of personal

experience training at the elite level in tennis with a variety of high-performance coaches. The

researchers background in tennis was considered a strength of the study as it facilitated rapport

between her and her participants coaches. Given her experience, she had her own assumptions

about the skills coaches use to build relationships with their athletes. As theories and experiences

influence an individual's mental constructions, the researcher was committed to engaging in the

co-construction of knowledge with her participant whereby both of their mental constructions are

thrown into juxtaposition (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Knowledge accumulates as mental

constructions become more informed and sophisticated throughout the dialectical process. This

knowledge can be transferable from one setting to another when there is a high degree of

similarity between two cases. Due to the thick descriptions provided through the dialectical

process, someone interested can make a transfer of inquiry to reach some conclusion.

Methodology

There are multiple traditions in qualitative research that help guide the collection and

analysis of data. Some traditions include *ethnography*, *phenomenology*, *grounded theory*, *life

history and narrative*, *critical ideological research*, and *case study* (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). A

case study is a "specific and bounded (in time and place) instance of a phenomenon for study"

(Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 55). The chosen phenomena could be a person, group, organisation,

process, or event. Questions within a case study capture the complexity of a single case by

exploring the answers to the "how" and "why" questions (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Additionally,

case studies attempt to analyze the contextual conditions as they are relevant to the phenomenon

being studied (Baxter & Jack, 2008). There are three kinds of case studies: *intrinsic,

instrumental,* and *multiple/collective case study.* This study used the *multiple case study*,

meaning it investigated the phenomenon of interest through a few cases in order to gain a deeper

understanding of the phenomenon (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). By doing a multiple case study, the

researcher analyzed the cases within each setting and explored the similarities and differences

between cases. One of the benefits of a case study is that it allows researchers to develop theory-

focused generalizations based on their results (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In order to limit the

scope of study, sometimes case studies include propositions. Propositions can come from the

literature, personal/professional experience, theories, and generalizations (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Based on the literature as well as the researcher's personal experience as an elite tennis player, the proposition of this case study was that a tennis coach with enhanced emotional intelligence will create stronger relationships with their players. This proposition was based off the literature on high quality coach-athlete relationships and emotional intelligence in leaders and coaches. It was also based off the researcher's personal experiences with high performance coaches. This study used case studies to identify how coaches navigated the interpersonal relationship with their athletes through emotional intelligence.

Participants

Sampling involves choosing the people and setting in which to explore the desired research question(s). The site, place, or person is chosen based on availability, accessibility, and theoretical interest (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The researcher purposefully looked for coaches who had reputations for creating strong coach-athlete relationships by adopting an athlete-cantered approach to their coaching (cf. Falcão et al., 2020). Using the researcher's personal connections to the Quebec tennis community, the researcher contacted Sylvie Giroux, the director of athlete development at Tennis Quebec. The researcher asked Sylvie Giroux for referrals of Canadian coaches who were known to create good relationships with their athletes, who paid close attention to their athlete's unique needs, and who have developed nationally and internationally ranked youth athletes. Following these referrals, six coaches were selected from a variety of tennis clubs in Quebec. The athletes who train at these facilities ranged between the ages of 12-18 and were involved in sport study programs (Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur, n.d.). Sport-study programs are designed to allow provincially and nationally ranked athletes to train at a competitive level and pursue a secondary level education. Athletes spend half the day at school and the second half of the day training at their sporting

facility. As the pace of learning is quicker than regular programs, student-athletes often learn to become autonomous and committed in their athletic and academic pursuits (Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur, n.d.). Interactions within these training sessions involve one coach and up to four players per tennis court. When athletes engage in match play, coaches often move from court-to-court observing athletes and providing feedback. Additionally, most athletes have their own personal coach who they train with, in addition to the sport-study program (Tennis Quebec, n.d.).

Based off the referrals, the participant tennis coaches of this study were chosen via *criterion-based sampling* which identified a predetermined set of criteria (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). These current participants were chosen based on their particular features, attributes, characteristics, or experiences that were relevant to the research questions. The participant coaches were selected based on their experiences through the following criteria: (a) currently teaching tennis to 14-18-year-old athletes who are nationally ranked, (b) have worked with provincially ranked tennis players for a minimum of five years, (c) hold a full-time coaching position at the host tennis club, (d) male or female over the age of 30, (e) well-respected in the tennis community and known to have good interpersonal skills.

Procedures. Prior to contacting potential participants, approval was attained by the McGill University Research Ethics Board. Following approval, participants were contacted via email asking for their anonymous participation in the study. Participants who were interested were provided with information on the data collection process (see Appendix A). Following that, participants were able to choose a date and time most convenient for them to engage in their first interview with the primary researcher. Given the current COVID-19 Pandemic, all interviews

were conducted via McGill webex rather than in person. Prior to the first interview, participant

coaches were provided with a consent form (see Appendix B) that was collected by email.

Data Collection

Qualitative Researchers can choose to collect data in several ways, including through

interviews, observational methods, media, vignettes, and *internet research* (Sparkes & Smith,

2014). One of the most commonly used methods of data collection in qualitative research is

interviewing (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). *Interviews* involve a purposeful conversation between

researcher and participant, with the intent to gain insight into the participants' perspectives,

feelings, and perceptions (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). An interview is a social activity involving

two or more individuals who engage in embodied talk, co-constructing knowledge about their

social world (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The purpose of the interview is to ask participants to tell

stories and descriptions about their experiences, perspectives, feelings, emotions, and behaviours

about the given research question (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). These conversations can also

provide information about the participants past decisions, values, and motivations, as well as the

socio-cultural factors that are meaningful to their lived experiences. As researchers listen

attentively and curiosity builds, the flexibility of interviews allows for the researcher to ask

additional, unplanned questions. Ultimately, these conversations provide a setting where

researchers can gain detailed information about the various meanings ascribed to the participants'

experiences, as well as the factors that influence their social lives.

The Interviewer Biography. As knowledge is co-constructed within the constructivist

paradigm, the researcher's role is not neutral (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The inquirer and

inquiry's experiences and perspectives are of equal consideration within the creation of

knowledge. Additionally, it is neither the goal of qualitative research, nor a possibility to step out

of one's experiences and social world to engage in the research process (Smith & McGannon, 2018). However, it is imperative that the researcher remains transparent about their own perspective and background as she must also be open to new meanings and experiences.

The researcher competed in competitive tennis at the provincial and national level for over 17 years. She was a member of the Tennis Québec provincial team between the ages of 12 and 14, which included travelling for both national and international tournaments accompanied by Tennis Québec coaches and teammates. She also trained in a Sport-Étude program in Montréal for over 6 years and was awarded a tennis scholarship at a Division 1 college in the United States. Throughout the years of training and competition, she had the opportunity to work with numerous high-performance tennis coaches. The researchers' history in competitive tennis provided rapport and trust with her participant coaches which allowed participants to be more open to sharing their experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Additionally, her background and experiences competing at a high level and working with numerous coaches provided unique interpretations throughout the co-construction of knowledge.

Interviews. There are three common types of interviews used in qualitative research: semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and group interviews (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Each method has its own strength and weakness, but a *semi-structured interview* is the chosen method for this study. Semi-structured interviews provide a pre-planned interview guide of open-ended questions that are used to direct the conversation. The flexible structure of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to rely on the same set of questions, but ask the question in a different way with each participant. The open-ended questions provide an opportunity for participants to answer the questions with rich detail, providing insight into their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and attitudes. The nature of these questions encourages the participant to share information about the meanings they ascribe to their experiences (Sparkes &

Smith, 2014). Each interview was audio-recorded and the data were transcribed and analyzed

using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

       Interview Guide. An interview guide was created in the current study (see Appendix C).

The interview began with a few questions asking the participant about his/her coaching

background and coaching philosophy. Next, the interviewer moved into the discussion of the key

questions which focused on how coaches built close relationships with their athletes. Open-

ended questions were used to encourage the participant to freely engage in a rich discussion.

Questions explored the various difficulties and stressors athletes face, such as academic, sport,

and social pressures. The questions centered around exploring what strategies coaches used to

establish strong relationships with their athletes. Questions also explored how coaches built

strong relationships with athletes who have different personalities, goals, and ideas. Further, the

researcher explored if coaches demonstrated care and respect towards their player's athletic

success as well as their personal and emotional success. The final questions encouraged the

participant to share information that they had not mentioned but felt was important (Sparkes &

Smith, 2014).

       Since the interview was semi-structured, there was an opportunity to ask additional

questions if greater detail was desired. Throughout the interview, *probe questions* were used

when the participant began to discuss something, but the researcher wanted the participant to go

deeper into their explanation (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Three types of probes can be used to

solicit additional information from the participant. *Detailed-orientated probes* ask the participant

for more detail to get a better picture of what is being told. *Elaboration probes* are used to

encourage the participant to keep going with their particular thought. When a researcher notices

that the participant is starting to talk about something that seemed important in regard to the

research question, the researcher can encourage the participant to keep going with their thoughts.

Clarification probes are used to encourage the participant to clear up any ambiguity.

   Story Completion Tasks. A large proportion of qualitative data are obtained through

self-report measures where participants provide information about their own experiences and/or

understandings of a particular topic (Clarke et al., 2017). In addition to collecting the lived

experiences via interviews, there are some qualitative research methods that collect data in

written form, including *story completion tasks* (SC) (Braun & Clarke, 2013). To begin, a *story*

stem is created by the researcher, which is a hypothetical scenario including information about

the people, setting, and context. The research participant is asked to imagine what he/she would

do in the particular situation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Story completion tasks give participants

more control and creativity to let their imagination go, allowing the researcher to indirectly

access a participant's assumptions about certain topics which may not be revealed throughout

unstructured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Clarke et al., 2017). Each participant will be

asked to complete the story in the space provided on the word document.

   In the current study, three story stems were created illustrating a different hypothetical

interaction between a tennis coach and athlete. Each story stem included information about an

athlete's academic, social, or athletic achievements and goals, as well as the athlete's on-court

tendencies and behaviours. For example, one story stem (see Appendix D) described a 2-time

national champion who is optimistic, up-beat, and hardworking. A second story stem (see

Appendix E) described an athlete applying to American universities. The third story stem (see

Appendix F) described an athlete who has just experienced a relationship break-up with their

partner. Twenty-four hours before a designated meeting time, the participant was emailed all

three stems in a Microsoft word document. The participant was asked to imagine what they

would do as the coach in each situation and to type "what happens next" in the 1-page provided

in the word document. Once completed, the participant emailed their responses to the researcher

to review. Following that, the researcher and participant met for 60-90 minutes the next day to

review the participants' story completion task. The researcher used this opportunity to ask

additional questions to explore why the participant filled out the story the way he/she did. For

example, the researcher asked, "why would you behave this way", "why would you say that to

your athlete", or "why is this important/not important for you?" The goal of this conversation

was to learn more about how the coaches managed the interpersonal interactions with their

athletes and to understand how the coaches made these decisions. Each story-stem meeting was

audio-recorded and the data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun &

Clarke, 2019).

The story completion tasks were used as a secondary source of data. Instead of asking the

participant directly what interpersonal skills they might use to connect with their athletes, these

story completions indirectly provided information on how coaches chose to communicate and

behave according to each situation. The goal was to acquire additional information into how

tennis coaches developed relationships with their athletes, how they managed the interpersonal

interactions with their athletes, and what interpersonal skills they used within these complex

relationships. Story completions were analyzed through thematic analysis (Clarke et al., 2019).

Throughout the analysis, the researcher engaged in inductive reasoning, where the researcher

'bracketed' their theoretical assumptions to see what emerged from the data (Sparkes & Smith,

2014). Based on the proposition, the researcher also identified if any themes emerged relating to

the four skills of emotional intelligence (perceiving, using, understanding, and managing

emotions). Additionally, the researcher extrapolated the research questions from the story

completion data. For example, themes were identified that answered the questions: what

strategies do tennis coaches employ to build strong relationships with their athletes? How do

tennis coaches build strong relationships with athletes who have different levels of academic, social, and athletic achievements and goals? Do tennis coaches demonstrate care and respect towards their athletes' athletic, as well as personal and emotional success? Taken together, the story completion tasks and interviews were combined to identify how each tennis coach builds relationships with their athletes through interpersonal and emotional intelligence skills.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis is the art of interpreting and creating meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). It involves immersion into the data, "a concern with what is in the data or how it is constructed, an examination of any possible interrelationships, and a reflexive awareness of the process of writing and representation" (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 115). There are several forms of qualitative analysis that exist such as *hierarchical content analysis, grounded theory analysis, thematic analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, narrative analysis,* and *thematic narrative analysis* (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). *Thematic analysis* was used to analyze the interview and story-completion task data in the current study. Thematic analysis involves organizing and describing patterns or themes throughout the data set. Themes do not exist within the data, passively waiting to emerge, but are generated from the data through the researcher's interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Additionally, the proposition of this study was used to guide and narrow the focus of the case study analyses (Yin, 2009). The proposition that a tennis coach with enhanced emotional intelligence will create stronger relationships with their players was put into question throughout the analysis of each case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By returning to the proposition, the researcher linked the data from the interviews and story-completion tasks to the four skills of EI (perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions).

There are six steps in a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The first step is to immerse oneself in the data and engage in thoughtful reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Second, *generating initial codes* involves generating a long list of codes that describe the data and then placing the relevant data within each code. *Searching for and identifying themes* involves sorting through codes, looking deeper into what they are capturing, and identifying possible themes that capture the meaningful essence found within the data. A thematic map will be used to organize themes into codes. *Reviewing themes* consists of two levels. Level 1 involves ensuring the themes and coded extracts work well together and are related. This involves reading through the collated data within each identified theme and considering whether it forms a coherent pattern. This step involves exploring if themes are problematic and whether extracts belong within their identified themes. Researchers can rework or create new themes and replace data where it fits best. Level 2 involves ensuring the themes describe the data set and that no additional themes are missing. *Defining and naming themes* includes determining the essence of what each theme means and determining which aspects of the data are captured within each theme. This involves determining how well the theme fits within the overall story and whether the data within each theme accurately represents that story. The final step, *writing the report* is the final opportunity to refine the analysis (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The report includes vivid data extracts that demonstrate how prevalent each theme is as well as an interpretation of the data (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Story completions were analyzed through thematic analysis (Clarke et al., 2019). Thematic analysis in story completion is slightly different than in self-report data. Instead of identifying patterns across all the stories as a whole, the researcher identifies patterns within each story through horizontal patterning (Clarke et al., 2019). Specifically, horizontal patterning

involves taking one story stem response and identifying patterns across the data. The goal of

horizontal patterning in thematic analysis is to identify themes through the facets of specific

research questions (i.e., coaches communication styles, behaviour and interpersonal skills, EI

skills, and athletes personal and athletic goals) within the story completion data (Clarke et al.,

2019). Since the research questions were not asked directly to the participant, the researcher

extrapolated these questions from the story completion data. For example, themes were identified

that answered the questions: what strategies do tennis coaches employ to build strong

relationships with their athletes? How do tennis coaches build strong relationships with athletes

who have different levels of academic, social, and athletic achievements and goals? Do tennis

coaches demonstrate care and respect towards their athletes' athletic, as well as personal and

emotional success? The common themes from story completion tasks and interviews were

combined to identify how they build relationships with their athletes.

Trustworthiness

Judging the quality of quantitative research centers around objectivity, reliability,

generalisability, and validity (Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Stenbacka, 2001). Due to the differences

in ontology and epistemology, it is more appropriate to judge the quality of qualitative research

through *credibility, transferability, dependability*, and *confirmability*. These four criteria were

used to measure the *trustworthiness* of the current qualitative research study. Firstly, based on

the ontological and epistemological assumption of constructivism, there is no such thing as

theory-free knowledge. Consequently, researchers and participants are unable to remove

themselves from their own social world and subjective experiences and will always influence

results (Denzin, 2017). Thus, the goal of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is

not to prove that results are objective, reliable, valid, and generalizable. Three methods were

used in the current study to establish trustworthiness.

Critical Friend. The goal of rich qualitative data is not to produce reliable, reproducible results. Further, researchers do not seek to produce the same interview twice. Instead, rigorous qualitative research produces "complex, layered, and rich interpretative insights of people's lives" (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 113). Instead of focusing on objectivity, qualitative researchers focus on confirmability. Confirmability ensures that interpretations of results are not a result of excessive biases and subjectivity. Researchers aim to be reflexive by identifying the perspectives they have brought to the research study and anticipate how these biases may influence the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of findings. One way to ensure reflexivity is through a critical friend. A critical friend operates as a theoretical sounding board as they listen to the researcher's interpretations and attempt to challenge them, by offering an alternative perspective and alternative explanations (Smith & McGannon, 2018). They encourage the researcher to reflect on their own interpretations by providing new and alternative insights of events (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The critical friend in this study was a university professor with a rich background in positive youth development and sport coaching and was a former elite tennis player in Europe.

Coherence. Meaningful coherence in qualitative research occurs when the study has successfully accomplished what it claims to achieve (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). According to Sparkes and Smith (2014), coherence occurs when methods and procedures accurately achieve the study's stated goals, where there are meaningful interconnections between the literature, research questions, findings, as well as the interpretations. By engaging in two semi-structured interviews, our study creates a complete and meaningful picture of how elite tennis coaches established successful coach-athlete relationships.

Substantive Width and Contribution. A final means of establishing trustworthiness was done through substantive width and contribution, where the sample of coaches were chosen based a specific set of criteria (Smith et al., 2014). By seeking referrals through Tennis Quebec and ensuring all coaches met the selection criteria, the participant coaches contributed to a homogenous sample of five 5 coaches who have a reputation for building successful coach-athlete relationships and developing nationally ranked, youth tennis players. Further, direct quotations from coaches were included within the results sections, allowing readers to form their own interpretations of the findings (Smith et al., 2014).

Chapter 4

Results

      This chapter presents the results of two one-on-one interviews between the lead

researcher and five elite tennis coaches. In total, both the semi-structured interview (SSI) and the

story completion tasks (SCT) interviews lasted 617 minutes. Each SSI and SCT provided

detailed insight into how coaches built strong coach-athlete relationships. The SSI ranged from

54 to 110 minutes (M = 82), while the SCT ranged from 77 to 151 minutes (M = 114). All

interviews were transcribed verbatim amounting to 118 pages of transcripts and 83,815 words.

From the total data set, 33 codes were identified and were condensed into seven themes, that

were then synthesized into two over-arching themes: *dyadic coach-athlete relationship* and

holistic coaching. The following section provides descriptions and quotes that describe the over-

arching themes. Pseudonyms are used throughout the section to protect participants' identities.

Dyadic Coach-Athlete Relationship

      This over-arching theme describes the coaches' experiences and characteristics that

influenced their coach-athlete relationships in tennis. The section is split into three themes: *the*

role of the coach; connecting with each athlete; coach-athlete closeness.

      The Role of the Coach. This theme describes how the coaches valued providing athletes

with the tools and guidance to become successful tennis players, as well as well-rounded human

beings. They believed their role as a coach was to help young athletes reach their peak athletic

potential, while also teaching good values and life lessons.

         My role as a coach is to make them the best tennis player they can be. But it's also

         important to help them become the best human being they can be. I want them to

become strong and confident, so they can conquer whatever they want in life. Tennis is

a tool to help them grow as a person in general (Charlotte, SSI).

The coaches reflected on how their role as a coach evolved throughout their coaching

career and was informed by their experience from playing tennis in their youth. Three of the

coaches (David, Charlotte, and Julie) competed in tennis at the national level, while the other

two played recreationally (Jordan and Lee). Although their playing experience varied from

recreational to professional tennis, they shared a passion for the sport and for having a positive

influence on young players' lives. Julie reflected on how her athletic career influenced her

coaching values and the values of her players.

I learned a lot from my coaches. I was able to transfer the skills that coaches used with

me to my players. I even see this now with my players who are becoming coaches and

who are guided by the values that I guided them with. Because those values were

important for them when they were a player and that's what their coaches gave them. So,

I think it's a cycle (Julie, SSI).

In addition to teaching athletes good values, coaches believed in the importance of

teaching life lessons. For instance, Lee (SCT) said:

I am not their mom or their dad, but I also feel that I have a little bit of a role as a coach

to prepare them for the tennis, but also for something else, which is life. I love tennis.

That's a big reason why I wanted to coach. But I also like to help people develop skills to

cope with things in life and the different challenges because they will happen. And

deception will happen. I want to provide them with the tools and mentality to be a little

bit better equipped and prepared to handle those disappointments.

In particular, when reflecting on their most memorable coach-athlete relationships, coaches focused more on the positive impact they had on their athletes' overall development rather than their athletic achievements:

> The boy's family doesn't have that much money. I was able to maximize the results both in tennis and in school, and I helped him become a good young man. I think that's even better than players I've worked with who did really well internationally and became professionals who won titles. Just somebody who didn't have a lot, who did very good with very little (David, SSI).

Taken together, these five coaches believed their role as a coach went beyond teaching players to reach their athletic potential. They unanimously expressed the value of having a positive impact on a young human being by instilling good values and life skills that will equip them for their future endeavours.

Connecting with Each Athlete. This theme explores the establishment of a shared bond between the coach and athlete, namely the coach-athlete connection. Coaches believed the connection they developed with each athlete was fundamental for building a strong relationship with them:

> Connecting to the player is about being able to go beyond the sport and beyond my role as a coach. I believe that each kid has a story. I believe that kids experience different situations that will make them give you a lot of energy or a little energy on court. I think there is always a reason for why they are happy or not happy, and why they perform or don't perform… they need to always feel comfortable enough to tell you what's going on (Julie SSI).

This connection was nurtured by mutual trust between relationship members. More specifically, coaches wanted their players to feel comfortable providing feedback regarding their tennis development and on how they could better meet the players needs:

I have this confidence and trust with my players. I tell players all the time what they should be doing. So, it's okay for them to tell me if there is something that I could do differently. I understand it's player and coach, but its two human beings too. So, it can go both ways (Lee, SSI).

Charlotte also discussed the importance of establishing mutual trust with one of her athletes. Through travelling together for competition, Charlotte (SSI) felt she "got to know her [the athlete] better."

She finally started to tell me more personal stuff, how she felt, and why she was reacting a certain way. I felt a big responsibility. She didn't have many people to talk to about what she was feeling. Then when she opened up, she started playing so much better and I could feel that she trusted me, and I was somebody she felt she could rely and count on (Charlotte, SSI).

David (SSI) also used travel as an opportunity to get to know his players better: "I build that rapport with my players from travelling and sharing special moments together. You build these relationships through travelling and experiencing difficult times and good times together." He also added that during dinner table conversations, "We don't talk tennis. No cell phones, we talk about life" (David, SSI). As coaches got to know more about their players, they made an effort to individualize their coaching approaches:

I sometimes joke more, try to think of a subject that they like, or ask them questions about things outside of tennis. I will talk about animals or school just so I get to know them

better. Even in drills, I will create a name for the drills because of what they do or how

they do it. I try to make drills that are unique for them and they can laugh about them too

during situations. I like to make the training more personal (Charlotte, SSI).

Although these coaches believed in the importance of getting to know athletes on a more

personal level, David and Jordan discussed the difficulties navigating coach-athlete relationships

after recent allegations around athlete maltreatment in the media. David (SSI) explained:

Trust is very important to connect to a player, especially with the negative things we've

heard about coaching. Recently, the news is discussing sexual allegations or coaches who

put too much pressure on the player. I'm afraid that the good coaches who want to

establish good relationships with players are going to become more distant. We can't hug

players anymore. There is no more tapping on the shoulder. How are we going to get

close to players and gain their trust? It's going to be harder, but we're just going to have

to do it.

In sum, the connection between a coach and athlete was built over time as coaches got to

know their players as more than just a competitive athlete. Through this connection, coaches

learned how to individualize training sessions to keep them fun yet challenging for athletes.

Finally, gaining athletes trust was crucial for coaches in a climate focused on maintaining a safe

sporting environment for youth athletes.

Coach-Athlete Closeness. This theme explores the importance of developing a close

relationship with each tennis player and how coaches navigated the interpersonal dynamics of

these relationships. Due to the amount of one-on-one time tennis coaches and athletes share

together, the closeness of the dyadic relationship had a major impact on the athletes' tennis and

overall well-being. The relationship was also influenced by the length of time working together

and the coach's gender. Lee (SSI) highlighted the impact that the state of the relationship has on the athlete:

> You want to make sure your relationship with your coach is good on the court and that he is going to help you with your game. But there should also be a good relationship off the court because you end up spending a *lot* of time with that person. If you're a tennis player, it's a very lonely world. You better have a good relationship with your coach. It's not going to be fun otherwise.

Without teammates or the ability to speak to coaches during matches, Lee (SSI) felt that the relationship had to be in a good place to best prepare athletes for the stress of competition:

> We're working on tennis. But so much of it is about making sure that your player is in a good state of mind. It's very difficult for a player to embrace their tennis and compete in a tournament with all the pressure they're feeling and to push themselves if things with the most important person in the tennis environment [the coach] are not smooth.

As the coach-athlete relationship had a major influence on the athletes' personal and athletic success, Charlotte (SSI) believed developing these close relationships was a huge responsibility:

> I call them my other children... I don't want to coach too many kids because I feel like it's too much responsibility. I don't want to let them down. I know how important I am in their life and I want to make sure I'm available for them.

Interestingly, Lee (SSI) noted "in tennis some relationships last longer, but the life expectancy is not that long." Nevertheless, coaches expressed that the length of time working together influenced the coach's ability to cultivate a successful and close coach-athlete relationship. Jordan (SSI) believed that "it's necessary to work with someone for a long time to

develop a solid relationship." Similarly, David and Julie explained the benefits of working with athletes long-term and starting at a young age. Julie (SCT) has worked with some athletes for over 10 years, starting as early as 6-years-old, allowing her to learn "what players need."

> To build the relationship, you need to have conversations and go through a process where you get to know the player. I still see kids who are 16 years old. They come into my office to have discussions and get my opinion. They come to speak to me because I *know* them. They get this honesty with me that they would not have with others because of the relationship we have (Julie, SCT).

Additionally, as coaches reflected on personal stories, the coaches' gender appeared to influence their interpersonal relationship. Julie (SCT) encountered a situation where a male coach was yelling at a female athlete for underperforming during training. As Julie observed the situation, she "made a judgment call" and believed the athlete might be "on her period." Understandably, the male coach did not believe it was appropriate for him to ask the athlete if she was on her menstrual cycle. Julie walked to the other side of the court and asked the player if she was on her period. Feeling shy and embarrassed, the athlete admitted she was, but did not want her (male) coach to know. Julie explained to the player, "You have to say these things because right now he has been giving you shit and yelling at you for the past 10 minutes. That's 10 minutes that could've been not happening right now." Once Julie told the male coach, "his tone completely changed, and his energy changed."

In this previous example, it is evident that the male coach feared making the athlete feel uncomfortable and crossing a boundary. However, his immediate shift in communication style exemplifies how impactful the female coach's presence and decision making was in this

particular situation. Charlotte (SSI) also believed that she attracted more female athletes because she is a woman:

> I mainly train girls. I guess that's what I'm attracting with my [coaching] approach where I get personal with my players. Sometimes a player had a tough coach or a guy coach who was not able to get through to them and the player is not opening up to the coach. Sometimes the parents think I could be good, and they say, 'Oh she's a girl, so maybe our child will open up' and I'm young and fun. That's sometimes the approach I get. But then I surprise them with the quality of coaching also.

Although the previous examples explore some benefits of being a female coach, the male coaches were also able to develop close relationships with their athletes. At the request of his athlete, Lindsay's parents, Jordan (SSI) often drove her to school: "I wouldn't do this with all of my athletes. I did this with Lindsay because I had an incredible connection and trusting relationship with her parents." Similarly, when athletes' parents were out of town, they were welcome to stay with David and his family: "My children know that I make sacrifices for players that I've worked with for a while. I bring them to my house and my wife cooks for them. They stay and they become friends with my daughters (David, SSI).

In sum, coaches underscored the importance of developing and nurturing a close coach-athlete relationship on and off the court. Coaches who worked with an athlete over a long period of time believed it was beneficial to the success of the relationship as it allowed the relationship members to get to know each other better and be more attuned to one another. Although each athlete will have their own preference, the coaches' gender appeared to also influence how interpersonal dynamics unfolded.

Holistic Coaching

This over-arching theme describes how coaches recognized and tended to the athletic, personal, and academic development of each athlete to enhance their performance and well-being. The section is split into four themes: *understanding the athlete; athlete challenges; managing parental involvement; coach adaptations.*

Understanding the Athlete. This theme explores how coaches learned to understand their athletes' tendencies, thoughts, and emotions. As each athlete is unique, coaches reflected on how they learned to approach each player and how to keep them motivated across different situations. In order to understand each player, coaches collectively encouraged honest two-way communication and actively listened to their thoughts and needs. Lee (SSI) reflected on a relationship he held with an athlete who recently had athletic success. He felt he really understood this player:

> I know what triggers her. I know which button to press to get her going and to get her passionate, to increase her confidence, and to sort of elevate her. I think it's a skill to have that feel. She is a dreamer. I noticed that and I tapped into it… I think I was able to wake something up in her. It was there, it was just sleeping or something.

Similarly, Julie felt that she was able to consistently read and interpret how her players were feeling on the court. She said, "I have a good feeling. I have a good sense. I read my players. After 30 years, I sense when a kid is not happy. I sense when there is something going on" (Julie, SSI). Charlotte (SSI) expanded on how the ability to read players dictated how she approached players and whether or not she adapted the intensity of training:

> I trust my judgment to know how they are feeling, to know when to push harder and when to use drills they like more, or to do something a little more relaxed. But just

because they are feeling bad doesn't mean I will make it more relaxed. Sometimes they

are not feeling good, and I know they can push more, and I will push them more. But

that's the advantage of working with an athlete for a long time. You get to know them

better and you can really know how to gauge the intensity.

Over time, coaches learned how to recognize and interpret their players' emotional state

by familiarizing themselves with each athlete's tendencies and way of being. If the athlete was

struggling emotionally, coaches were able to pick up on it by observing changes in their athletes'

mannerisms:

A lot of time it's the way they carry themselves and their body language. I will see how

they carry themselves during practice and how they respond. Because sometimes

someone will give a good effort, but I can just see like it's something in their eyes. Their

persona is just different, and you can see that there is something there (Lee, SSI).

Charlotte (SSI) reflected on a moment where she confronted her athlete because she

"didn't feel like she was really into it" and it was interfering with the quality of training. She

approached the athlete and said:

You know, it's normal to sometimes not feel so motivated. But you're the only one who

knows how you feel. You're the only one who knows what your 100% is today and it's

important that you can evaluate it for yourself and tell me that you're giving the best that

you can today.' But just by opening the door like that, she began opening up about how

she was feeling and how, yes, she was having a tough time (Charlotte, SSI).

Although these coaches felt strongly about their ability to accurately read players'

thoughts and emotions, they also wanted players to tell them if something was on their mind

without feeling like they needed to share intimate details. Jordan (SSI) said, "without necessarily

telling me [what's wrong], the athlete needs to tell me how they feel… Then I explain to them,

'It's totally normal that it is not working today, but you need to be able to talk to me.'" Similarly,

Lee (SSI) described a situation where he appreciated that his athlete was honest about how she

felt without feeling like she had to share details:

> I don't put pressure on my players to tell me things, even if it has an impact on practice.
>
> It's fine with me if someone says, 'Something happened at home and it's just a bit tough
>
> for me to concentrate.' And I'll say, 'That's okay.' And I am happy that I know this
>
> information because then I understand, and I might think or do things or be a little less
>
> demanding in practice. If they want to talk about it, then I am there.

Julie also provided an example where she adjusted her decision making after her athlete

explained his aversion towards the decision. Julie's athlete (Jamie) was not selected for one of

the national programs despite being one of the best players in his age group. The coach

responsible for the selection process, Ryan, happened to walk by during a practice between Julie

and Jamie. Julie was working on giving Jamie technical feedback and thought it would be

beneficial to get another coach's opinion. Jamie walked up to Julie and said, "If [Ryan] comes on

the court, I'm telling you right now, I'll take my stuff and leave." Julie believed this was a bit out

of character, but also understood that the athlete "meant what [they] said." Julie was empathic

towards Jamie's feelings and did not ask Ryan to come on the court. Julie later added that "the

ability and willingness to be honest is 100% part of developing a good relationship" (Julie, SSI).

Whether it was about their athletic development or personal struggles, when an athlete

communicated their thoughts and feelings to their coach, coaches reported listening attentively

"to what the player wants and needs" (David, SSI):

Do players come to me and ask for my advice on a lot of things? They do. And it's not

related to tennis. I try to just listen because sometimes that's what they want: for someone

to talk to and listen to them, and to be able to express themselves and vent. Sometimes

they want some advice and when that is the case, I always try to be a good sounding

board (Lee, SSI).

Listening to players when they chose to talk about what was troubling them was

important for all coaches. David (SSI) believed "the athletes are going to be dealing with so

much stress outside of tennis and that's why the relationship [with the coach] is so important."

In sum, coaches expressed the importance of being attentive to their players' thoughts

and emotions, and believed that they were quite accurate at deciphering when a conversation

needed to be had. Ultimately, coaches wanted players to be as honest as possible so that they

could adjust the training intensity and their coaching approach, if necessary. Finally, when

athletes sought advice or confided in their coach, coaches were empathic and receptive to their

players' feelings and needs.

Athlete Challenges. This theme explores how coaches were mindful that their athletes

would inevitably experience challenges within and outside the sporting context, which

influenced their athletic performance and overall well-being. In training and competition,

athletes were expected to consistently give their maximal effort and coaches had a strict,

minimum standard for the quality of tennis. However, coaches stressed the importance of being

aware of athlete injury, overtraining, and fatigue, as well as any personal difficulties or negative

emotions they may experience:

In my heart, I knew that some kids were in a depression. But I don't have the skills and

knowledge to say that this is what it was. I do have the ability to say, 'This is what I

think. So, let's make sure I'm doing things to counter that.' So, I adjusted myself. I

adjusted my expectations and my sessions because I knew where my athlete was

[mentally]. I wasn't going to continue to knock on the head and add more stress (Julie,

SSI).

Given the athlete's languishing mental health, Julie wanted to maintain her tough athletic

expectations, while providing a nurturing coaching approach. Similarly, despite holding high

expectations for his athletes, Lee (SCT) explained that he was also sensitive to what his athletes

were feeling. In reference to an athlete who was having difficulty practicing as she was dealing

with some relationship issues, he was willing and prepared to adjust himself accordingly:

I have a standard that I don't go below in practice. There is no reason for me that is good

enough for it to be lower than that. But I surely don't want to sound like it's all about

tennis. 'Something is coming up, let's adapt, and let's try to have a good practice if that is

possible. Maybe practicing will help you, maybe not, everybody is different.' I surely

don't want to be insensitive to what they are going through. I want to be able to say,

'Listen, let's not practice today.' It's not like, 'Oh you suck, I'm going to cancel practice'

like in a punishing way (Lee, SCT).

As the athletes were navigating their athletic, academic, and social world, coaches

noticed lower intensity and focus on the court when athletes were experiencing difficulties in any

of these spheres. When this happened, the coaches collectively believed that if they did not

adjust the drills and/or kept asking more of their player, the athlete would only end up feeling

worse. Lee (SSI) said "[he is] very open-minded about changing the schedule of practice or

cancelling a practice if [the athlete] has an exam" or if they wanted to attend a "party or fun

weekend with friends." He believed that if he "let them do other things [other than tennis], then

they will be happy in other spheres of their life." Lee felt that if he encouraged a healthy balance between his athletes' academic, tennis, and social life, they would become "well-balanced individuals and it might help them on the court as well" (Lee, SSI).

In addition to personal issues, coaches were mindful of athletes' fitness level and overall fatigue. David worked with a top ranked athlete who had to stop training temporarily due to an injury. After having a couple of months off, the athlete returned to tennis with "weight issues" and "wasn't moving well on the court." Understanding that this was a sensitive issue, David tried to relate to the athlete by explaining that he doesn't drink alcohol or eat sweets on weekdays, but sometimes treats himself to a little bit of both on the weekends. David suggested the athlete can similarly "cut down [on] the sweets and the bread" to get his weight under control. In the end, the athlete agreed to follow the diet and fitness plan created by his nutritionist and strength and conditioning coach. After following it diligently, "the kid dropped the weight, got the fitness level up, performance went up, and he did much better." David said, "it's a happy story, but it wasn't a fun process" (David, SSI).

As coaches valued the importance of developing proper strength and conditioning, they understood that athlete's may come to practice feeling overtired from their off-court fitness programs. Lee provided an example where his athlete was tired from her fitness session and he adjusted his expectations. Lee was getting frustrated because his athlete was not performing well on the court and was progressing much slower through drills than usual. In response to his frustration, the athlete approached Lee and said, "I want to be here. I am listening. But I am just dead tired, and I might not be able to do exactly what you want to do and the way you want me to do it." The athlete expressed she was afraid Lee would be disappointed. Instead, he was glad she "trusted" him enough to be honest and said, "if she had not told me, I think I could have

gotten on her nerves a little bit by trying to push her." Given that she had a long day of fitness and tennis the day before, Lee understood and "prepared [himself] right away and [his] expectations changed" (Lee, SSI).

To conclude, coaches held high expectations on the tennis court, while paying close attention to what athletes were going through in other spheres of their life. When issues arose, whether mental or physical, they often influenced the athletes' ability to perform and changed their overall demeanour on the court. When coaches recognized and were sensitive to athletes' challenges, athletes benefitted both on and off the court.

Managing Parental Involvement. This theme explores how coaches managed parents' behaviours and perspectives towards their athletes' success. Coaches believed that parents had good intentions regarding their child's development and had a big influence on their child's athletic experience. Consequently, coaches frequently had to manage parents' involvement to ensure they appropriately supported their child's successful and healthy development. Coaches explained that it was challenging at times to deal with parents who behaved in ways that did not optimally support their athlete. David (SSI) explained that parents' behaviours affected his coaching:

> If one parent is really negative and always says, 'That's not good enough!' I have to
> know that. Usually, one parent is more involved than the other. So, if one parent is super
> negative and is very tough, then you have to balance this out with the player. But you
> can't balance it out too much because maybe the player benefits from that [parenting
> style]. If the player doesn't benefit from that [parenting] style, then you have to balance it
> out even more.

Particularly at a young age, parents significantly influenced athletes' thoughts and feelings. Consequently, coaches deemed it important to know what parents were saying to their children when they were not around. Charlotte (SSI) said, "sometimes the parents are too involved and are too much in their kids' head. This doesn't help them do their reflection and analysis, because they're only thinking, 'Oh, I don't want to get in trouble with my parent.'"

Especially within youth tennis, parents tend to get overly involved in their children's athletic careers, which can feel overbearing for coaches. David (SSI) explained that this led some coaches to exclude parents from coaching practices: "Their attitude is 'ugh parents. Get them out!'" However, David outlined an understanding for why parents can get emotionally invested in their children's sporting involvement: "They invest so much time, energy, and money into [their child's tennis]." As a result, he does "the opposite [to other coaches]. I bring them in as much as possible because how the parents think is so important." David believed it provided good insight into how to coach and communicate to a player when he knew what their parents' perspectives were. Jordan (SSI) held similar views about the importance of involving parents within their children's sporting experience: "I'm not the type of coach who's going to tell a parent to move aside and just pay the bills, and to only be there when their child is crying or is happy. There is an important role here." Interestingly, Jordan also believed that, at times, it was useful for parents to help out on court, especially if he was trying to explain something to the athlete and they were not understanding: "Whether it's a technical difficulty or they aren't understanding what I'm trying to explain to them, this is a time where the parents can rephrase what I am saying to help them understand" (Jordan, SSI). Given parents' influence on their child's thoughts and feelings, Jordan also discussed how he worked to manage parents who he perceived were not being supportive towards the athletes' needs:

[The athlete's] family was the type to look at the tournament draw, look at the seeds, and

look at who is playing who. I had to tell her parents quickly, 'You have to stop all this.

Stop the comments like that, or the comments after the match that I may not even find out

about.' So, I really worked at establishing the parent's role (Jordan, SSI).

It was important for coaches to get parents more involved instead of pushing them away

when they were interfering with their athletes' goals. Charlotte liked to inform parents of "what

the athlete is working on and what path they are going on at all times so that the voice they echo

is similar to [hers]." Charlotte (SSI) wanted parents to be "on board with what [she was] saying.

[Her] approach with the players needs to be consistent with what the parent's approach is."

Considering the influence parents had on their child's thoughts and perspective, coaches believed

it was more effective when they were communicating similar messages to the athlete about their

development. The coaches were also empathetic towards how much parents cared about their

children's success and wanted to find creative ways to get them involved to ensure everyone is

"on the same page" (David, SSI).

David outlined one strategy he used to get parents more involved. He regularly

encouraged parents to chart technical and mental strategies throughout their child's matches so

they can understand the athletes' goals and improvement over time. David wanted his player to

"come up to the net more often" in matches. After the son lost a match in a tournament, the

mother said, "I can't believe my son lost to this guy." David was stunned at the mother's

response because the athlete had been doing exactly what they were working on. David asked the

mother to look at the chart and notice how often the boy came to the net and how often he won

the point. The mother noticed "he won 7 points out of 10 at the net." David responded, "about 3

months ago he came to the net 3 times and he won 1 point." The mother was still focused on the

fact that her son lost, so David said, "When you're at work, if you go from 30% to 70%, you have an increase of 40% in performance. Would your boss give you a thumbs up or down for this?" The mother finally understood what David was explaining and instead of getting upset at her son for losing, she congratulated him on his commitment to coming to the net. By helping the mother understand that the athlete was working on a skill that would take time to develop, David was able to explain why losing this match had nothing to do with her son's athletic abilities. Had David pushed the mother aside and not gotten her involved with charting the athlete's match, perhaps on the drive home, the mother would have focused too much on the loss instead of the success of his net presence. This example exemplifies how useful it can be to find creative ways to get parents involved in the athletes' goals so parents can provide support and encouragement when athletes are doing what they are supposed to.

Julie (SCT) encountered a situation where "the mother was way over involved with her kid. It got to the point where the player said, 'Julie, she is a problem. I can't compete when she is there. She is stressing me out.'" Empathizing with the athlete's feelings, Julie approached the athlete's mother and said, "We're going to try something. For the next 3 upcoming tournaments, I am going to go to the tournaments alone with your daughter." Because Julie knew the mother wanted to be at all of her daughter's matches, she said, "I know that if you will say yes to this, and she doesn't perform well in the first tournament, you're going to say, 'you see? Your idea is not working.' So, let's commit to three tournaments." Without the presence of the mother, the athlete competed very well in all three tournaments and produced successful results. This example highlights how some athletes can internalize immense pressure to perform from parents. As the parent did not intend to make the athlete feel this pressure, this story provides insight into how an athlete may interpret their parents' behaviours and involvement in a negative way.

In sum, parents have a big influence on their child's athletic development and experience. Coaches wanted to get parents involved with the athlete's goals, so they knew how to communicate in ways that are similar to the coach and supportive to the athlete's goals. Coaches also wanted to create a healthy balance where parents were involved in training and competition so they could support the athlete, without making them feel unnecessary pressure to perform.

Coach Adaptations. This theme explores how coaches responded differently. More specifically, coaches adapted their choice of drills, drill intensity, and communication style based on the athlete's personality and long-term goals, as well as the time of season:

> You can have a bunch of really high-level players and you do not approach their game the same way, and you do not approach them personally the same way. If you deal with Athlete A and Athlete B, it's very different. How you prepare your practice and what you do in practice will be different. It is the same sport, but how you go about it is completely different (Lee, SSI).

As tennis players train to improve their technical and tactical skills, they repeat similar drills throughout each practice which can feel very repetitive. To encourage athlete confidence and motivation, coaches ensured athletes always left practice feeling as though they succeeded at something. Jordan believed if an athlete was not having a good practice or struggling with an exercise, he had to make adjustments to the drill to help them achieve success. He explained that he often noticed that other coaches do not adjust in response to their athletes and just "have a plan that they stick to." When coaches don't adjust themselves, the athlete "will go home [after practice], and she won't believe she's any good" (Jordan, SCT). Alternatively, Jordan (SSI) felt it was important to "adapt [his] coaching style based on how [the athlete] feels, whether it's stress, injury, or fatigue:"

There are different ways I can adapt to my players. I will outright change the exercises or

change the objectives. I can do shorter exercises with the player that are less focused on

whether or not they succeed at a task. I can completely remove the focus on success, so

we can just develop the feeling or change something technically.

In order to keep drills exciting and enjoyable for players, both Lee and Charlotte used

drills that they called "feel good drills" that were specific to each athlete. If the athlete appeared

unmotivated or down on themselves, this was a good time to incorporate these drills into the

trainings. Charlotte (SSI) explained when and how she decided to incorporate these drills:

I'll learn when to push and when to be more sensitive. My training will be similar, but the

timing may be different based on when to push or not. I have "feel good" drills. You end

the training, and it was good because it was tough physically or because you have a good

feeling. Sometimes this is what they need. Sometimes, I need to work on their

weaknesses with drills that they won't feel comfortable doing.

The primary objective of drilling is to improve the athlete's technical and tactical skills.

Nevertheless, coaches focused on creating drills that were challenging enough to push the

athlete, but enjoyable enough that the athlete felt confident about their skill improvement. David

(SSI) also liked to give athletes some autonomy over choosing which drills they would work on.

He would ask them "What do you want to work on today? These are my two priorities today. But

what would your third priority be?" David added that athletes sometimes chose to work on a shot

they rarely use in match play but loved to hit. He was comfortable spending "10 minutes"

working on this shot because he believed it would help athletes "develop real confidence in

themselves."

In order to provide athletes with the skills and knowledge to become competitive tennis players, coaches provided verbal feedback throughout their one-on-one training sessions. As receiving constructive criticism is necessary for skill development, deciding when and how to deliver constructive criticism was part of ensuring the coaches' message resonated with the player. Coaches believed it was important to identify effective ways to deliver constructive criticism as they did not want the athlete to feel "attacked or threatened" (Lee, SSI). In order to do so, Lee adjusted how he delivered feedback based on the athlete' personality. He said, "I'm not trying to change them or get them to fit my personality. I am trying to adapt myself so my message will resonate with them" (Lee, SSI). Charlotte (SCT) also adjusted her communication:

> Some players are very honest and factual. I know emotionally they won't get distraught if I tell them something a little harsher, so I can say it quickly. If I know they are more sensitive, then I will be more careful with my timing.

Jordan believed it was important to "find the right time to deliver constructive criticism and the right way to deliver it" (SSI). To further explore this, Charlotte provided an example where she chose the wrong time to deliver constructive criticism. Her athlete had just lost a match and she wanted to explain to her, "This is what happens when you play girls who hit high balls. You're not able to deal with it. That's why you just lost the match." Immediately after the match, Charlotte went back on court with the athlete, and they worked on this specific shot. Charlotte (SSI) said:

> She was way too distraught from the loss and not ready [to receive the information]. But I kind of wanted to make it a lesson for her to remember that next time she needed to hit those swing volleys and she needs to be aggressive and not be patient. But it actually got worse and then she got really sad because she couldn't do it in practice.

Coaches also adjusted themselves based on where the athlete was in their career and what their long-term goals were. For example, David (SSI) discussed how some of his players were training to become professional tennis players where tennis was their main priority. However, a larger number of his players wanted to play tennis in university and potentially go on tour when they graduated. Within that cohort, some athletes intended to play at a university that prioritized sports over academics, so they did not need high academic test scores to apply. Whereas other universities required outstanding test-scores in addition to athletic talent. David said he was very mindful that the athletes who needed to have exceptional grades and high-test scores to get into top ranked universities will have a lot of additional pressure to perform in school.

In addition to adjusting to athletes' academic priorities, coaches had to navigate the challenges related to COVID-19. Jordan believed the restrictions of COVID-19 helped him recognize the benefits of giving his players more autonomy in training:

> The young athletes are available every day to learn. On one hand I appreciate it. On the other hand, it's not easy to keep them motivated because they don't have tournaments to evaluate their progress. In a sport where you play a lot of matches and tournaments, it definitely brings a bigger challenge" (Jordan, SSI).

As tournaments were continuously getting cancelled and restrictions were becoming stricter, Jordan said, "Normally we plan around the year, now we're planning around COVID. It can feel a little bit robotic to do the same thing or do what we used to do with the athletes." In order to keep athletes motivated through the challenges of the pandemic, Jordan (SSI) said, he and the other coaches "organized a tournament and put the students on teams so they played against each other." During some practices, he also encouraged the athletes to "organize the lesson plan, so

they had some autonomy too. [He] would do this in normal times, but during COVID [he tries to be] more creative and tries to do different things to break the monotony."

In sum, coaches valued the importance of finding the most effective way to communicate to each player and ensure that their message was well received. Coaches adjusted their interpersonal approach and decision-making based on their athletes' preferred communication style and long-term goals, as well as the time of season. Finally, they prioritized athlete confidence and motivation by adjusting drills to allow them to achieve success and believe in themselves.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Five highly successful Canadian tennis coaches provided detailed insight into how they managed the complexities of their coach-athlete relationships. It appeared that coaches employed an athlete-centered coaching approach (cf. Falcão et al., 2020) where they cared deeply about the overall development of the young human being they were coaching. They outlined *how* they learned to understand each athlete and *how* they adjusted their interpersonal approach to continuously meet their athletes' evolving needs. This chapter discusses the results of this study as they pertain to related literature and the 3 + 1 C's conceptual framework (Jowett, 2006; Jowett, 2007). This framework helps explain the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, where high quality relationships consist of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Jowett, 2006). When the quality of the relationship is high, it contributes to greater satisfaction, motivation, and passion (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). Despite the breadth of knowledge, it is still unclear what strategies and behaviours coaches use to establish and improve the quality of their relationship with athletes. Additionally, most research in this domain has been quantitative. While quantitative studies objectively measure the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, qualitative studies can explore what variables coaches consider when establishing relationships with multiple athletes as well as how they accomplish this.

In an effort to further our understanding of *how* high-quality coach-athlete relationships can be fostered, this chapter focusses on the discussion of three overarching findings. First, holding and continuously refining an athlete-centered coaching philosophy was fundamental for participants' fulfillment of their role as coaches, as it provided the foundation for the creation of close, trusting, and caring relationships with their athletes. Second, coaches believed it was

imperative to learn to understand their athletes through honest communication and spending

quality time together in order to support and care for their athlete's overall development. Finally,

coaches seemed to engage in emotionally intelligent behaviour to manage their emotions and

manage parental involvement in order to facilitate a collaborative working relationship with their

athlete and parents.

Athlete-Centered Coaching

Findings of this study revealed that coaches' primary objective was to develop high-

functioning human beings with a healthy life balance. Indeed, it appeared that coaches in this

study were guided by a humanistic coaching philosophy, which is an athlete-centered ideology

that emphasizes athletes' personal growth and development, as well as the creation of

collaborative coach-athlete relationships (Falcão et al., 2019, 2020; Lombardo, 1987; Lyle, 2002;

Nelson et al., 2014). Results were consistent with previous research indicating that high-

performance coaches can employ humanistic coaching principles by encouraging athletes to

maintain a healthy balance between their sport, school, and family obligations (Falcão et al.,

2019, 2020; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Since athletes were putting so much time and physical

effort into their training, coaches believed it was imperative that athletes also felt fulfilled in

other domains of their life (e.g., academic success, spending time with family, building social

relationships). Encouraging and allowing athletes to have a greater life balance helped coaches

establish mutual trust and appreciation within their coach-athlete relationships as athletes

understood their feelings and needs were always being considered. To that end, Falcão et al.

(2017; 2019) found that athletes of trained humanistic coaches believed their coaches cared

about them as human beings by always supporting their academic and personal endeavours. In

turn, this allowed athletes to build trusting relationships with their coaches and to have a

favourable sporting experience that produced feelings of success, motivation, autonomy, and responsibility in both school and sport (Falcão et al., 2019). Other coaching science researchers have produced similar findings, noting that trained humanistic coaches built stronger coach-athlete relationships (Allan & Côté, 2016; Erickson & Côté, 2016; Vella et al., 2013; Weiss et al., 2016). Interestingly, the coaches in this study were not told or taught to apply an athlete-centered approach, even though this philosophy was ingrained in their coaching objectives. The current coaches felt a huge responsibility to make sure their athletes were happy and developing optimally in all spheres of their lives. This frequently led athletes to confide in their coaches or request advice from them about personal issues (e.g., break ups, friendship issues, family issues, university applications/rejections). Although it was not part of their job description, coaches were willing to take the time to offer guidance as it allowed them to foster supportive and close relationships. If and when sensitive matters arose (e.g., languishing mental health, disordered eating, injury), coaches ensured athletes were surrounded with appropriate care (e.g., psychologists, nutritionists, physiotherapists). As stories of athlete maltreatment are increasingly being reported (Alexander et al., 2020; Bisgaard & Støckel, 2019; Kerr et al., 2019; Kerr, Kidd, et al., 2020; Kerr, Willson, et al., 2020), coaches emphasized that athletes needed to feel like they could trust the most important person in their athletic environment. Ultimately, this athlete-centered approach provided a more holistic sporting environment allowing coaches to establish strong bonds with their athletes, ensuring they were developing optimally.

Although having an athlete-centered approach appears to help coaches establish trusting and close coach-athlete relationships, it remains unclear how coaches can effectively adopt an athlete-centered coaching approach, including how they can adjust themselves to best meet the unique needs of each athlete (Cushion et al., 2010; Nelson et al., 2014). To that end, the coaches

in this study provided strategies and behaviours they used to encourage personal growth and development on and off the court. More specifically, they encouraged athletes to provide feedback on how coaches can better meet their needs, had many conversations with athletes about life in general, and involved parents as much as possible to ensure they communicated and behaved in ways that were supportive towards the athletes' needs. These efforts allowed coaches to individualize training sessions and nurture supportive relationships. These findings are noteworthy as previous studies highlighted that humanistic coaching practices fostered positive and collaborative coach-athlete relationships by being understanding and supportive towards athlete's thoughts, opinions, and feelings (Lombardo; 1987; Nelson et al., 2014). We suggest that having an athlete-centered coaching philosophy is what allowed these coaches to learn and engage in effective strategies and behaviours that established high-quality relationships. We understand that not all coaches are instinctively guided by or are aware of an athlete-centered coaching philosophy. Fortunately, coach education programs can be used to educate coaches about the importance of holding such a philosophy and how to incorporate it into their coaching.

Coach Education. It is understood that effective coaches can continuously adjust themselves to meet athletes' ever-changing needs (Becker, 2013; Côté & Gilbert, 2009). In order to become aware of why it is important to learn and *how* to adjust oneself, coaches should be provided with educational opportunities that emphasize the complexity of coaching (Banack et al., 2012; Barnett et al., 1992; Smith et al., 1979; Smoll et al., 1993). To that end, there are several ways coaches can acquire the skills, knowledge, and expertise that underpin effective coaching practices (e.g., formal, nonformal, informal learning) (Irwin et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2003; Nelson et al., 2006; Schempp et al., 1999). For example, Canadian coaches can obtain formal learning through the National Coaching Certificate Program (NCCP) (Gowan, 1992),

offering a variety of learning opportunities designed to develop the skills and competencies of

coaching athletes at various performance levels (Gurgis et al., 2020). Unfortunately, researchers

have criticized formal coach education and certification programs for providing a de-

contextualized, one-size-fits all approach to coaching (Côté, 2006; Nelson et al., 2006; Vella et

al., 2013). This undermines the complexity of coaching, which requires alternative ways to

respond to different situations (Côté, 2006, Nelson et al., 2006; Vella et al., 2013). Instead of

providing a "toolbox" of skills that can be passed down from educator to learner, the

development of knowledge is a far more complex process (Cushion et al., 2003; Rossi &

Cassidy, 1999). In fact, Gurgis et al. (2020) noted that between 2016-2017 there was an increase

in coaches enrolling in the NCCP, yet only 10% completed the certification process. Since coach

education programs focus more on theory rather than application, some coaches believed their

applied experience and learning from other coaches was more relevant for developing coaching

expertise compared to formal education programs (Mesquita et al., 2014; Wiersma & Sherman,

2005). Interestingly, as the coaches in this study reflected on their acquisition of knowledge and

development as a coach over time, they did not reference their coach education programs as an

example of where this learning was fostered. Instead, they explained that their progression of

learning was informed by more informal means of learning, such as their own youth athletic

experiences, observing and having conversations with other coaches, and working with a variety

of youth athletes. They also outlined engaging in regular and critical self-reflection after using

successful and non-successful coaching behaviours within their relationships, noting that they

learned to be more understanding for athletes' evolving needs over time. These findings are in

line with *informal learning*, which encompasses the amalgamation of knowledge, skills,

attitudes, and insights a person has acquired throughout their life (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974).

Indeed, the coaches adopted self-directed learning practices by exploring the internet, reading

books written by successful coaches or renowned philosophers, watching technical and tactical

videos specific to tennis, and watching educational videos on successful tennis coaching.

Interestingly, it appeared that as each athlete's learning style, personality, and preferred

communication were unique, so too were these coaches' approaches to building successful

relationships and ensuring the overall development of the human being. These findings further

suggest that in order for formal coach education programs to be worthwhile, they must explore

ways for coaches to adjust to the variety of factors involved in coaching (e.g., athlete personality,

preferred communication style, athlete stress, injury, parental involvement). Since no two

athletes, coaches, or situations are the same, the ability to adjust accordingly is imperative if

coaches want to help athletes reach their potential.

In conclusion, it appeared that coaches were guided by a self-taught, athlete-centered

approach and believed in continuously refining their coaching skills in order to best meet

athletes' needs. The ability and willingness to adjust across various situations allowed coaches to

individualize trainings and establish mutual trust with their athletes. In order to teach coaches

early in their career how to effectively respond to athletes evolving needs, coach education

should explore the benefits of adopting an athlete-centered coaching philosophy, towards one

that encourages flexibility and adaptability to athletes' needs. The programs can outline effective

tools and strategies used to ensure the athletes are developing holistically, and to respond to a

variety of factors (e.g., stress, emotions, personality, communication style). In order to further

incentivize coach certification through formal education, such as the NCCP, enrolled coaches

should be provided with additional resources. For example, the NCCP can provide an online

platform for coaches to connect and learn from one another and share useful resources, as well as

additional access to peer-reviewed coaching science journals. This will allow coaches to stay informed with current research and new coaching strategies and encourage collaboration between coaches, which can encourage lifelong learning, and ultimately better coaches. Ultimately, refining these programs to emphasize athlete-centered coaching and *how* to continuously adjust to athletes needs will assist coaches in building supportive, collaborative relationships with their athletes, resulting in greater performance, satisfaction, and passion in sport.

Understanding the Athlete

Findings of the current study revealed that coaches built close and trusting relationships by making an effort to understand their athletes' thoughts and emotions over time. The ability to understand an athlete falls within Côté and Gilbert's (2009) conceptualisation of *interpersonal knowledge,* which is the knowledge required to build and maintain relationships in the sporting environment. Building off of the belief that the connection fostered between a coach and athlete lies at the heart of effective coaching (Jowett, 2017; Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016), coaches in the present study suggested that learning to understand athlete's thoughts, emotions, and behaviours underpinned their ability to connect to athletes. In fact, Lorimer and Jowett (2009a; 2009b; 2013) have studied *empathic accuracy* within the coach-athlete relationship, which is a coach's ability to accurately infer what their athlete is feeling and thinking from moment-to-moment throughout training. Lorimer and Jowett (2013) identified that greater empathic accuracy contributed to positive relationship outcomes, and therefore more effective coach-athlete relationships. More specifically, Lorimer and Jowett (2009a) found that coaches of individual sports were better at inferring athletes' thoughts and emotions - exhibited greater empathic accuracy - when both the coach and athlete were focused on the same task (e.g., technical skill, tactical drill). Our findings

expand on these results, as coaches were able to identify what athletes were feeling and thinking, especially when athletes appeared to be off task. For example, if the coaches perceived that an athlete was distracted, frustrated, or overly emotional, coaches believed it was unhelpful to ignore these emotions and continue training. It was precisely in these moments that coaches made an effort to pause the training to help athletes move through this difficult time. As coaches are key contributors to youth athletes' physical, psychological, and social development (Strachan et al., 2011), it is crucial that they recognize athletes' fluctuating emotions and understand how they influence them on the court. Given that the elite youth sport context is categorized by high expectations and an emphasis on performance, some researchers have questioned whether it offers the optimal climate for coaches to facilitate positive youth development and create meaningful relationships (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Harwood & Johnston, 2016; Preston et al., 2021). However, these coaches emphasized that their high expectations should never outweigh their athletes' psychological and social development. Thus, we suggest that these coaches' understanding of their athletes' emotions established a high degree of empathy which enabled trust and appreciation within their coach-athlete relationships.

Despite previous studies outlining the importance of coaches making an effort to understand their athletes (Becker, 2013; Côté & Gilbert, 2009), there lacks an exploration of *how* coaches can learn to do so. To that end, coaches spent a lot of time with their athletes on and off the court, deliberately making an effort to get to know them personally and foster a personal connection with each tennis player. Coaches encouraged their athletes to openly discuss their lives (family, friends, academics/work), life goals, and future aspirations with them. These findings are noteworthy as Lorimer and Jowett (2013) suggested that coaches should lengthen training sessions or take time out of practice to interact with athletes beyond technical instruction

as a means to develop their relationship. Additionally, coaches' empathic accuracy tends to be higher when there is more available information about the athlete (Lorimer & Jowett 2010), where communication allows for a greater congruence between coach and athlete perspectives (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013). Coaches also emphasized that they wanted their athletes to consistently provide honest feedback about training, and to feel comfortable requesting that their coach do things differently to better meet their needs. For competition, coaches traveled with athletes on weekends and sometimes abroad for several weeks. Parents were often unable to travel and without teammates, coaches said high-performance tennis can be a lonely world for athletes. For this reason, coaches believed the relationship needed to be as supportive and healthy as possible for the athlete to enjoy themselves and perform. Although there appears to be a positive relationship between greater communication and empathic accuracy (Lorimer & Jowett, 2010; 2013), coaches outlined that they wanted to have conversations with athletes unrelated to tennis because they cared about them as human beings and wanted to get to know them.

Due to the major time commitments, coaches chose to make many personal sacrifices (e.g., missing children's milestones, spending less time with children/significant other), but believed their actions were essential for the development of close relationships with their athletes. Interestingly, coaches admitted that these sacrifices and efforts could not be expected from all coaches. They expressed that it may also be difficult for team sport coaches to get to know all of their athletes on a personal level when there are numerous athletes and assistant coaches involved. These findings build off previous research suggesting that the interpersonal dynamics of team and individual sports differ (Bloom et al., 1998; Chelladurai, 1993; Jowett et al., 2017; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Rhind et al., 2012; Smith & Smoll, 2007). More specifically, Rhind and colleagues (2012) identified that individual sport athletes reported feeling

closer and more committed to their coaches than athletes in team sports. These differences are likely because athletes in team sports view their relationship with their coach as less interdependent since coaches often address the team as whole, rather than each individual athlete (Rhind et al., 2012). Our results look deeper into the interpersonal dynamics, as they suggest the dyadic coach-athlete relationship benefits from spending one-on-one time together to get to know each other on a personal level and from greater two-way communication. Given these coaches' reputation for building successful relationships and developing high-achieving athletes, perhaps this understanding is what sets this cohort apart from other tennis coaches.

Interpersonal Adaptations

Findings of the current study suggested that coaches adjusted their interpersonal approaches to meet their athletes' needs using the four skills of Emotional Intelligence (EI) (i.e., perceiving, using, understanding, and managing one's own and others' emotions; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). These findings build on research proposing that EI is an essential component of coaches' interpersonal and leadership skills, which are needed to motivate and interact effectively with athletes, as well as plan and execute effective behavioural responses (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Gilbert & Côté, 2013). Despite limited research exploring EI in sport (Laborde et al., 2016), a relationship between effective coaching practices and EI has been suggested by a few authors (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Heelis et al., 2020; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Thelwell et al., 2011). In fact, a coach or leader who actively gathers emotional information about their athletes is said to better adjust their leadership style and regulate their own emotions to work effectively with their athletes and develop quality relationships (Chan & Mallett, 2011; George, 2000). To that end, the coaches in this study believed that in order to build successful coach-athlete relationships, they had to take their athletes "emotional

temperature" (reading and understanding their emotions) throughout practice and adjust their

interpersonal approach accordingly. Ultimately, these adjustments allowed coaches to develop a

trusting, emotional bond with their players. Their actions fall within the framework of exhibiting

strong aspects of EI (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer 1990).

Throughout training sessions, tennis coaches continuously made interpersonal

adjustments based on the athletes' needs, which highly individualized their relationship.

Ultimately, it required a high degree of introspection and adaptability to consistently read and

understand the causes and consequences of athletes' emotions and choose appropriate

interpersonal adjustments to improve coach-athlete interactions. These findings build off two

recent studies identifying that the use of EI allowed coaches to manage the interpersonal

negotiations of high-performance coaching (Heelis et al., 2020; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016).

First, Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) studied 14 serial winning coaches from five team sports

and one combat sport. Findings suggested that high levels of EI were necessary for coaches to

adapt their behaviour according to each individual. Additionally, Heelis and colleagues (2020)

identified that eight experienced ice hockey coaches used EI when deciding how to manage

difficult athletes (aged 15-20). More specifically, before deciding how to respond to difficult

athletes, coaches considered several variables, including individual factors (background/history

of each player), social actors (billets and parents), coaching strategies, and the team environment.

Although these two studies suggested that coaches adjusted to their athletes' individual needs by

using their EI, the vast majority of these coaches worked in team sports. As coaches in team

sports often address the team as a whole (Rhind et al., 2012), their interpersonal adjustments will

be in response to the emotional climate of the entire team, and not necessarily to each individual

athlete. Indeed, without having to consider teammates or assistant coaches, the current coaches

adjusted all aspects of training (e.g., drill choice, difficulty of the exercises, verbal instruction) to meet their athletes' evolving needs. Specifically, coaches used their understanding of athletes' behavioural/emotional tendencies and personality, as well as other information available about them (e.g., athlete's family situation, romantic relationship, etc.) to craft the best way to communicate with their athlete. It is important to highlight that the coaches in this study were working with some of Canada's most talented youth players and that they were adamant that developing successful coach-athlete relationships required them to constantly read and adjust to athletes' emotional needs. Further, they believed that it should not be expected that youth athletes simply switch off their thoughts and emotions upon arriving to practice. They emphasized that these athletes are high-functioning and hard-working individuals who deserve close attention and care.

Although Gilbert and Côté (2013) suggested that EI may extend our understanding of a coach's interpersonal knowledge to connect to and understand each athlete, we suggest that coaches who have a high degree of intrapersonal knowledge can engage in EI to continuously adjust to athletes' needs. A coach's *intrapersonal knowledge* includes their ability to understand one's own past mistakes and learn from them (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Indeed, throughout interviews and written story completion tasks, coaches often reflected on moments throughout their career where they mismanaged a situation and did not address an athlete properly. A recurring example among coaches was choosing the wrong time to deliver constructive criticism, resulting in their athlete feeling personally attacked and becoming closed off. Consequently, coaches believed that learning to read and respond appropriately to athletes was an ongoing process developed through honest communication with athletes, personal self-reflection, and the willingness to acknowledge and learn from mistakes. We suggest that it requires both

interpersonal skills and intrapersonal knowledge to continuously learn and refine these skills to meet athletes' needs.

       Parental Involvement. The emotionally intelligent behaviour allowed coaches to not only adjust to and manage athletes, but also manage parental involvement. Despite the limited attention given to EI within the coach-athlete relationship, the International Tennis Federation published a position paper identifying practical ways in which tennis coaches can use EI within coach-athlete-parent interactions (Van de Braam, 2013). Van de Braam (2013) suggested that coaches who behave in emotionally intelligent ways can improve the success of coach-athlete relationships by better managing challenging emotional situations with athletes and their parents. The coaches in this study agreed that tennis players' parents played a central role in their athletes' development by facilitating tournament and training opportunities and providing ongoing commentary about their child's athletic success. Indeed, it is well understood that youth athletes' parents are significantly involved in their children's athletic experience by supporting them financially and providing emotional support, particularly after a poor performance or loss (e.g., Baxter-Jones & Maffulli, 2003; Gould et al., 2008). In addition, parents provide feedback at home, in relation to training, as well as before/after competitions (Furusa et al., 2020). Finally, parents are important role models as they positively and negatively influence children's sporting experiences through their display of behaviours across a range of situations (Harwood, 2016). Given the major implication on their child's athletic experience and personal development, coaches believed it was ineffective to ignore or discourage parental involvement. Instead, coaches actively managed parents by explaining their child's long-term goals, emphasizing effort over performance outcomes, and encouraging parents not to display their fluctuating emotions while their child competed. As it is well understood which parental behaviours are supportive

and unsupportive (see Dohme et al., 2020; Holt et al., 2008; Knight & Holt, 2014), these findings suggest coaches can play an active role in helping parents identify the most supportive behaviours for their child's psychological and athletic development. Interestingly, Knight and Holt (2014) suggested that parental behaviours are neither good or bad, however optimal parental involvement can be achieved when parents match the involvement and behaviours that their child prefers. Indeed, the coaches in this study observed and listened to which behaviours their tennis players favoured versus disliked and then provided this information to parents so that they could adjust themselves accordingly. These findings extend Dohme et al.'s (2020) suggestions that parents of elite athletes should not be viewed through a deficit lens, but valued as well-intentioned individuals, willing to learn how to effectively support their child's positive development. Overall, our findings demonstrated that these tennis coaches built successful and trusting relationships with their athletes by using the skills of EI to manage them, as well as their parents' involvement. Given the influential role of parents in a young tennis player's development (see Gould et al., 2006; 2008; Lauer et al., 2010), it should be emphasized that the effective management of parental involvement should be part of coaching elite youth tennis players. Our results also suggest that developing a successful coach-athlete relationship is facilitated by an understanding of parents' emotions and the influence these emotions have on their child. From a practical viewpoint, we suggest that coaches engage in dialogue with both athletes and their parents to collaboratively identify effective strategies to work as a team. Finally, future studies should explore how coaches, particularly tennis coaches, can manage parents' emotions in order to facilitate a supportive, collaborative coach-athlete-parent relationship.

Chapter 6

Summary of the Study

Research has demonstrated that high-quality coach-athlete relationships contribute to greater performance outcomes (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016) and personal satisfaction (Davis et al., 2013; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Lorimer, 2009). When a coach and athlete form a genuine, working relationship, the coach and athletes' emotions, thoughts, and behaviours are highly interdependent (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett, 2017). In fact, with less opportunity for one-on-one interaction (Baker et al., 2003; Jowett et al., 2005; Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996), it has been suggested that team sport athletes may view their relationship with their coach as less interdependent (Rhind et al., 2012). As various researchers have explored the coach-athlete relationship from a quantitative perspective, it remains unclear what behaviours and strategies individual sport coaches can use to develop a unique connection with each athlete. Thus, this study aimed to identify how coaches continuously established successful coach-athlete relationships with their tennis players.

Upon receiving approval from the McGill Research Ethics Board, five high performance tennis coaches were recruited to partake in this study. The coaches had been coaching Canadian tennis players for a minimum of five years, with four coaches having coached for over 30 years and one coach who competed on the professional tour. The selected coaches were highly successful at developing close coach-athlete relationships and helping young tennis players attain national and international success. All coaches were recruited via email to engage in two semi-structured interviews and three written story completion tasks. Interviews were conducted by the primary researcher. The first interview ranged between 54 to 110 minutes and the second interview ranged between 77 to 151 minutes. All data were analyzed using thematic analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2019; Clarke et al., 2019), which identified themes within the data and provided insight into how coaches developed successful coach-athlete relationships.

Data analysis revealed two higher order themes: *a) the dyadic coach-athlete relationship* and *b) holistic coaching*. The dyadic coach-athlete relationship referred to the coaches' experiences and characteristics that influenced the continuous development of successful coach-athlete relationships with tennis players. Holistic coaching referred to the coaches' efforts to ensure athletes' optimal personal, academic, and athletic development to enhance their performance and well-being.

Although each coach used their own strategies and behaviours to nurture successful coach-athlete relationships, they all demonstrated a deep care for their athletes' psychosocial development. For example, coaches emphasized that they did not want athletes' lives to revolve entirely around tennis and that they wanted them to develop healthy social relationships and pursue their academic endeavours. Coaches also emphasized that they had a responsibility to ensure athletes were provided with adequate care and support to supply their physical and mental health. As coaches nurtured trusting relationships with their tennis players, they understood they had a major influence on athletes' overall development. In sum, results from the current study add to the coach-athlete relationship literature by exploring the strategies and behaviours used to develop close and trusting relationships with elite youth tennis players.

Conclusions

Dyadic Coach-Athlete Relationship

- Coaches explained how they developed a shared bond with each athlete where they got to know them on a personal level and established mutual trust, and believed this bond was the foundation of successful coach-athlete relationships.

- Coaches outlined that the development of the emotional bond was instrumental in allowing them to develop successful players on the tennis court.

- Coaches described how they developed close relationships by ensuring athletes felt safe and supported, where their needs were continuously being met.

- Coaches highlighted their responsibility in ensuring young tennis players felt supported, comfortable, and safe within the sporting environment and that they trusted them as their primary coach.

- Coaches appeared to use emotional intelligence to manage their athletes and those in their sporting environments to improve the coach-athlete relationship.

Holistic Coaching

- Coaches were guided by a coaching philosophy that emphasized instilling life skills and good values, so their athletes are prepared for their athletic, personal, and academic pursuits.

- Coaches explained how they maintained high-quality training sessions and high expectations while being mindful of athletes' challenges in and outside the sporting context.

- Coaches outlined that their understanding of the athlete as a human being was pivotal in ensuring they were developing a successful tennis player as well as a well-rounded individual.

- Coaches discussed how they learned to understand athletes' thoughts, emotions, and tendencies so they could effectively communicate and motivate them, as well as guide them through life challenges.

- Coaches appreciated honest feedback from athletes as it allowed them to adjust their interpersonal approach to continuously meet athletes' athletic and emotional needs, and individualize training sessions.

- Coaches explored strategies and behaviours used to manage parental involvement to ensure parents provided appropriate support and encouragement to their child.

Practical Implications

The current study provided detailed insight into the strategies Canadian tennis coaches used to build successful coach-athlete relationships. There are several practical implications for coaches who wish to appropriately respond to athletes' individual needs and continuously nurture trust and closeness within the dyadic relationship, while still developing high-performing athletes.

First, all these coaches were innately guided by an athlete-centered coaching philosophy, emphasizing personal growth and athletic success. They emphasized that understanding athletes' personality, preferred communication styles, current academic/personal situation, and emotions were the foundation of developing successful coach-athlete relationships. This allowed coaches to be flexible and adaptable to the unique needs of athletes within the coach-athlete dyad. We suggest that coaches who show a genuine interest in their athletes lives, and their overall success will demonstrate their appreciation and liking, which are characteristics of successful coach-athlete relationships. Additionally, the coaches in this study also trained tennis players for 60-120 minutes several days a week, often working on similar technical skills and tactical patterns. Given the repetitive nature of tennis trainings and the frequency of direct feedback, we suggest that players who believe their coach genuinely cares about them as a person will be less likely to take constructive criticism personally and more motivated to work hard for their coach. Similar

to these five coaches, we suggest that tennis coaches who wish to establish an emotional bond and develop successful players should deliberately have conversations with athletes unrelated to tennis, allowing relationship members to get know each other as human beings. Additionally, we suggest that the establishment of an emotional bond allows athletes to feel supported, comfortable, and safe within the athletic environment and establishes mutual trust within the dyadic relationship.

Second, these coaches emphasized the importance of nurturing a connection with each of their youth tennis players. Coaches explained that tennis is an individual sport that requires a high degree of mental stamina as athletes compete in a match for 2-3 hours and are unable to communicate with their coach. As athletes begin to play national and international tournaments, the coach and athlete travel together, and parents are often unable to join. As one coach expressed, tennis can be a very lonely world for young players and if the coach-athlete relationship is not close or supportive, it is nearly impossible for a player to train and compete to the best of their abilities. Additionally, while these athletes were traveling for competition, they were required to fulfill their academic requirements. Although they were traveling for competition, coaches helped athletes understand that their course work was just as important for long-term development as their athletic success. To that end, coaches emphasized that it was normal for athletes to bring their emotions onto the court and felt a major responsibility to help them find healthy strategies to cope with their high expectations. Thus, we suggest that tennis coaches use traveling as an opportunity to connect with their athletes, getting to know them better and helping them navigate their athletic, academic, and social world. We emphasize that coaches who establish a close emotional bond while still respecting the athletes' privacy and boundaries are more likely to hold successful relationships with their athletes, ultimately

bringing about greater athletic success. In sum, tennis coaches who take the time to establish a connection with their athlete are more likely to develop a high-functioning human being, prepared to manage the various high expectations of elite youth sport.

Finally, these coaches included parents in the athletic environment, rather than excluding them as some elite coaches do. They outlined that parents are very involved in the athletes sporting experience as they drive their child to and from practice and competition, and provide ongoing feedback on the child's athletic success. Given the important influence as a role model, parents have a significant impact on their child's athletic experience through their communication, perspectives, and behaviours. Additionally, as the establishment of a connection and a close coach-athlete relationship were crucial in helping tennis players achieve success, coaches emphasized that they needed parents to communicate similar messages to the athletes. In order to facilitate cooperation between the parent(s), athlete, and primary coach, coaches helped parents adopt supportive communication and behaviours. Coaches explained athletes' long-term goals, emphasizing the importance of praising effort over performance outcomes, and encouraging parents to manage their emotions throughout competition to avoid adding additional stress to the child. Thus, we suggest that coaches should avoid getting frustrated by parental involvement and attempt to educate parents on how to successfully contribute to the development of the elite athlete. However, we recognize that coaches may not have the time or feel ill-equipped to collaborate with parents. Yet, we suggest that being more sensitive to their opinions and engaging in more informal conversations explaining one's coaching philosophy may enhance greater understanding between parents and coaches and help prevent internal conflict within the coach-athlete-parent relationship. Finally, coach education can also teach coaches how to enhance athlete psychosocial development, establish supportive and close coach-

athlete relationships, and involve parents by educating them on how to provide their child with

appropriate care and support.

Limitations and Recommendations

Although our findings offer rich insight into how tennis coaches established successful

coach-athlete relationships, several limitations in this study should be outlined. First, the sample

of coaches was selected based on a specific set of criteria, including having coached for a

minimum of five years, having a reputation for building successful coach-athlete relationships,

and having developed 14–18-year-old tennis players who have reached national and international

success. Although this provided a homogenous sample of high-performance coaches, the sample

size of coaches (N = 5 coaches) resulting from the recruitment criteria limits the transferability of

the findings. First, as the sample consisted of only tennis coaches, the findings may only be

applicable to individual sports where coaches and athletes form a dyadic relationship without

teammates and assistant coaches. Additionally, the interpersonal skills necessary to build

successful coach-athlete relationships may differ across individual sport type. Second, our

sample consisted of Canadian tennis coaches who were recruited through Tennis Canada and

were developing young Canadian tennis players. Although it was not a major finding, coaches

briefly touched upon how tennis coaches from other countries interact and coach their tennis

players quite differently. Thus, our results may not be transferable to tennis coaches from other

countries with different cultural backgrounds. It would be beneficial to consider how tennis

coaches foster successful coach-athlete relationships across a wider geographical context.

A third limitation of this study is that although our results focused on how coaches used

the skills of EI, we did not quantitatively measure the participant coaches' emotional intelligence

scores. It would be interesting for future studies to explore if a relationship exists between the

quality of coach-athlete relationship (measured through the CART-Q) and the total EI scores of both the coach and athlete (measured through the MSCEIT). Fourth, we only recruited coaches and did not explore their athletes' perspectives. Future studies should recruit coach-athlete dyads to explore each relationship member's perspectives to provide a deeper understanding of how successful coach-athlete relationships are built. By doing so, researchers can extend our understanding of what youth athletes need within this relationship to achieve performance and personal satisfaction. A final limitation of this study is that we did not get to engage with athletes' parents. Although coaches described parents' values, perspectives, and effective/ineffective behaviours, it would be interesting for future researchers to recruit the two members involved in the coach-athlete dyad as well as at least one of the athletes' legal guardians (presumably the one who is more involved with the athletes' development). These findings would further our understanding of how coaches can effectively manage parental involvement to facilitate youth athletes' sporting experience and facilitate collaboration between the primary coach, athlete, and parent(s).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Recruitment Script

Dear _____,

My name is Mikaela Papich, I am currently a second-year master's student in sport psychology under the supervision of Dr. Gordon A. Bloom at McGill University. Based on your exemplary coaching credentials and high level of experience as an elite tennis coach, we are inviting you to participate in our research project on the interactions and relationships between tennis coaches and their elite athletes

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 90-minute interview with you at a time and location of your choosing. Given the current Covid-19 Pandemic, there is a possibility that interviews will be conducted virtually via McGill Webex rather than in person. You will also be provided with three short scenarios describing a hypothetical interaction between a coach and athlete and then asked to complete the story.

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: https://www.mcgill.ca/sportpsych/.

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

Sincerely,

Mikaela Papich   Gordon A. Bloom, Ph.D.
Master's Candidate, Sport Psychology   Professor
Dept. of Kinesiology &PE   Dept. of Kinesiology & PE
McGill University, Montreal   McGill University, Montreal
mikaela.papich@mail.mcgill.ca   gordon.bloom@mcgill.ca

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Appendix B

Coach Informed Consent Form

This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts for Mikaela Papich, a graduate student in sport psychology in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at McGill University. We would like to invite you to participate in our study titled, "Elite Tennis Coaches' Perceptions of the Interpersonal Elements of the Coach-Athlete Relationship". If you choose to participate in this study you will be requested, without payment, to partake in an in-person 90-minute audiotaped interview where you will be asked to discuss the coaching strategies and behaviours you use with your athletes. Due to Covid-19, interviews may be conducted virtually via McGill Webex. Although all precautions are taken, there is always the possibility of third party interception when using communications through the internet. If more information is necessary, then a follow-up telephone interview may occur. For virtual meetings, it is not mandatory to participate by video and you can keep your video camera off. Additionally, you will also be asked to read three hypothetical scenarios between a coach and athlete and asked to complete the story. You will meet with the researcher in-person for 60 minutes the day after completing each hypothetical coaching scenario and to discuss your rationale for how you completed the story. The interview and story completion sessions will be audio-recorded on an audio recorder and transcribed verbatim within 14 days following the meeting. This data will be stored on a password protected MacBook Air Laptop that only the primary researcher has access to. The data collected from the interviews and story completion tasks will be analyzed by identifying themes, which involves organizing patterns throughout the data set.

At the end of the interview and the hypothetical story completion meeting sessions, you will have the opportunity to clarify or edit any comments you made. You will also receive a typed transcript of the interview from the principal investigator's McGill email, which may be edited at your discretion. Once the data collection process is complete, the data will be analyzed by identifying themes and common patterns. Prior to publication, you will receive copies of the results and conclusions of the study. Any and all information you provide throughout the study will **remain confidential**. Only the principle investigator, Mikaela Papich, and the faculty supervisor, Dr. Gordon A. Bloom, will have access to identifiable data. All identifiable data will be stored on a password protected laptop that only the primary researcher has access to. In order to protect your identity, you will be given a pseudonym name throughout the data collection. Additionally, any third party that is identified throughout the data collection will also be given a pseudonym name. All audio files and the digital copies of interview transcripts will be securely stored in encrypted folders on a password-protected computer. Any paper copies of notes will be converted to digital files. After ensuring they were converted accurately, the paper copies will be destroyed. All data will be destroyed seven years after publication. The information and results from this study will be used in the principal investigator's, Mikaela Papich, master's thesis. Additionally, the information will be used for publication purposes and scholarly journals or for presentations at conferences. Your name and identity will not be revealed 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 prejudice.** There are no expected direct benefits to you from participating in the study, but it is hoped that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how tennis coaches develop high quality relationships with their athletes. There are no anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. However, in order to protect any proprietary knowledge and personal information shared throughout data collection, all data will remain confidential and pseudonym names will be used.

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. Please contact the Research Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831, or Lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca, if you

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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.

       Please sign below if you have read and understood the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities.

_____   _____   _____

Signature   Name (Please Print)   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

Mikaela Papich, B.A.   Gordon A. Bloom, Ph.D.
Master's Candidate, Sport Psychology   Professor
Dept. of Kinesiology & PE   Dept. of Kinesiology & PE
McGill University, Montreal   McGill University, Montreal
mikaela.papich@mail.mcgill.ca   gordon.bloom@mcgill.ca
438-356-7581   514-398-4184 ext 0516

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<p align="center">**Appendix C**</p>

<p align="center">**Interview Guide**</p>

Pre interview Routine

- Introduction of researcher and overview of the study

Opening Questions

1. Briefly tell me about your coaching career including some of your most memorable moments.

2. What initially sparked your interest in coaching young tennis players?

3. In addition to on-court training, are there aspects off the court that you consider part of your job as a coach?

Main Questions

4. What does 'connecting to a player' mean to you?
   a. What are some strategies you use to connect with a player?

5. Please explain how your athletes' behaviours might affect how you communicate and interact with them.

6. Could you describe how you perceive your role in deciding when and how to deliver constructive criticism?
   a. Can you provide an example(s) where you provided your athlete with constructive criticism and it wasn't well received?
   b. Probes: athletes' personality, situational factors (current mood, internal stress), or context (training, pre-competition)

7. How do you choose to adapt your coaching styles to accommodate each individual athlete?
   a. Probes on athletes: athletes' personality, situational factors (current mood, internal stress), or context (training, pre-competition)
   b. Probes on coaching styles: trainings, instruction, choice of words, body language, emotional regulation

8. Given that young athletes are juggling academic, social, and sport-related stressors, how do you perceive your role in helping them cope with these various demands?
   a. What are some of the strategies you use to respond to the emotional changes in your athletes?

9. What are some challenges you have encountered in creating relationships with your players?

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      a. What did you learn from experiences with: difficult athletes? Highly emotional athletes? Injured athletes? Athletes with poor work ethic? Athletes with low/high confidence? Athletes experiencing burnout?

      b. How often do you reflect on your challenging relationships with your athletes and what sorts of questions do you ask yourself?

10. What are some of the best practices you've seen other coaches use that enhances their coach-athlete relationships?

      a. Probes: In tennis? In other sports? It can be anyone.

      b. Why do you think those practices were so useful for enhancing their relationship?

11. Can you please share a memorable relationship that you have had with one of your athletes?

      a. What was so special or unique about it for you?

12. Could you describe a significant life event outside of coaching that may have impacted your coaching career?

Summary and Concluding Questions

13. Is there anything that we didn't cover in this interview that you wish to add?

14. Do you have any final comments or questions?

Probe Questions to stimulate reflection

- Can you expand on that?

- That's interesting, tell me more about that.

- Could you please tell me more about this?

Appendix D

Story Completion Task #1

Instructions: Please write a 1-page document about what you would do next if you were the coach in this situation.

Player A is a 13-year old 2-time national champion. This particular player is usually upbeat, optimistic, and hardworking on the court, however sometimes he/she can be hard on himself/herself. This player has been preparing for months for the summer national championships and is expected to win them again. Prior to the competition, the athlete expressed feeling very confident. This athlete tried to say that "it's not always about winning." The athlete also looked forward to competing at such a high level. The player had a few pretty good matches and was playing his/her usual hard-hitting, offensive game style. The athlete gets to the semi-finals of the tournament and plays the whole match on his/her heels and appears to be really tight. The player unexpectedly loses 6-2, 6-3 to a player well below his/her caliber. Following the match, the player shakes hands with the opponent and runs into the empty stairwell behind the player's lounge. You question whether or not you should follow your player or give them some space. You get to the stairwell and player A is sitting with his/her head in their hands. What happens next?

Provide your answer on the following page…

Probe: Have you experienced a situation like this before with an athlete? Please tell me how you chose to manage the situation.

Appendix E

Story Completion Task #2

Instructions: Please write a 1-page document about what you would do next if you were the coach in this situation.

An athlete has successfully applied to several universities in the United States with Division 1, 2, and 3 tennis programs. The athlete purposefully applied to a variety of universities that had different academic standings and levels of tennis to increase his/her chance of gaining acceptance. The athlete has had his/her heart set on three universities. The athlete has already been rejected from two of his/her top three choices and you were trying to remain hopeful and optimistic for the athlete. You encouraged the player to focus on things they could control like their current athletic and academic goals. As you were sitting on the court with your athlete during a water break, he/she took out his/her phone and received notice that they were rejected from the third school. The athlete reads the email out loud, puts the phone down, and goes completely silent. You're feeling equally as shocked considering his/her transcripts and athletic abilities. You're trying to figure out what to say or do. You're afraid to say the wrong thing or to sound too positive when this is obviously a devastating moment for both of you, but you know you have to come up with something fast. Although the athlete has several other universities that they have not responded, you know his/her heart was set on going to one of his/her top three choices. What happens next?

Probe: How do you perceive your role in this situation?
Probe: Have you ever encountered a situation like this with your athlete? How did you handle it?

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Appendix F

Story Completion Task #3

Instructions: Please write a 1-page document about what you would do next if you were the coach in this situation.

Athlete C is 14-years-old and is very motivated and trains hard. You know this athlete has a rocky relationship with his/her partner. As a seasoned coach, you've lived through a lot of athlete breakups and relationship problems. You heard through someone else that your athlete's partner broke up with him/her over the weekend. It's Wednesday afternoon and you have a 90-minute practice with your athlete and you've organized a specific timely managed practice with the expectation that your athlete was going to be ready to work. Upon receiving the news of his/her break-up, you're wondering how the athlete is going to feel today. You're also wondering if you should ask the player if he/she wants to talk about it or if you want to just stick to the training game plan. The athlete walks onto the court and you see he/she is completely distraught. What happens next?

Probe: Have you experienced a situation like this with any of your athletes? How did you manage it?
Probe: What do you perceive your role to be in your athletes' personal problems and relationships?