DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE: CANADIAN UNIVERSITY COACHES'

PERCEPTIONS ON PREPARING FOR NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES

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Abstract

Research in sport psychology has continuously demonstrated that athlete performance and satisfaction are influenced by their coaches' knowledge, skills, and behaviours. Although there are numerous publications on how coaches influence their athletes' performance during regular-season contests, there is limited research on how coaches prepare themselves and their teams for National Championship competitions. For any team, winning a National Championship is a difficult task, but winning several National Championships is extraordinary and very few coaches have accomplished this goal. The purpose of this study was to investigate highly successful Canadian university coaches' perceptions on how they prepared themselves and their teams for continued success at the National Championship Tournament. The participants were six Canadian university coaches who had combined to win 16 coach of the year awards and more than 30 National titles. Data were collected through individual interviews and were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) guidelines for thematic analysis. The results revealed that the coaches' ultimate goal was to develop and maintain a high standard of excellence in their programs every year, which was accomplished by meticulous planning, effective communication, emotional management skills, and self-reflection. Developing a culture of excellence started by elaborating detailed seasonal plans that encompassed every aspect of training starting the first day of training camp up until and including the National Championship game. This allowed the coaches to maintain a culture where they demanded high levels of technical, tactical, physical, and mental excellence in training. This culture was nurtured every year through effective communication with athletes and support staff. In particular, the coaches felt it was critical to meet with the players and support staff before leaving to the tournament venue to reiterate and clarify their roles and expectations, which allowed the team to stay focused and avoid unnecessary distractions during the tournament. Once the championship tournament began, the coaches felt it was important for themselves and their athletes to effectively manage their emotions. Finally, the participants believed it was important to engage in self-reflection after each National Championship because it allowed them to assess and modify their coaching skills and behaviours for subsequent seasons. In sum, this study adds to the body of literature on coaching expertise by providing one of the first empirical accounts on how coaches prepared their teams for National Championship Tournaments. The findings of this study benefit both head and assistant coaches by offering insights and strategies on how to develop and maintain a culture of excellence in elite sport programs.

Résumé

La recherche en psychologie du sport a continuellement démontré que la performance et la satisfaction des athlètes sont influencées par les connaissances, les comportements, ainsi que les compétences de l'entraîneur. Malgré de nombreuses publications basées sur la façon dont les entraîneurs influencent la performance de leurs athlètes durant la saison régulière, il y a un nombre limité de recherches sur la façon dont les entraîneurs préparent leurs athlètes et se préparent eux-mêmes pour un championnat national. Gagner un championnat national est une tâche difficile pour n'importe quelle équipe, mais gagner plusieurs championnats nationaux est extraordinaire et peu d'entraîneurs ont accompli ce but. Cette étude visait à enquêter les perceptions des entraîneurs universitaires canadiens réussies liées à la façon dont ils se sont préparés et ont préparé leur équipe pour un succès continu au tournoi du championnat national. Les participants étaient six entraîneurs universitaires canadiens qui avaient ensemble gagné 16 prix d'entraîneur de l'année et plus de 30 championnats nationaux. Les données ont été recueillies par le biais d'entrevues individuelles et ont été analysées en suivant la démarche de Braun et Clarke (2006, 2013) pour une analyse thématique. Les résultats ont révélé que le but ultime des entraîneurs était de développer et de maintenir un standard élevé d'excellence dans leurs programmes chaque année, ce qui était accompli par une planification minutieuse, une communication efficace, des compétences de gestion d'émotions et par l'autoréflexion. Le développement d'une culture d'excellence commençait en élaborant des plans de saison détaillés qui englobaient tous les aspects de l'entraînement dès le premier jour du camp d'entraînement jusqu'à et y compris la finale du championnat national. Cela a permis aux entraîneurs de maintenir une culture où ils exigeaient des niveaux élevés d'excellence technique, tactique, physique et mentale lors des entraînements. Cette culture a été entretenue chaque année grâce à une communication efficace avec les athlètes ainsi qu'avec le personnel de soutien. En particulier, les entraîneurs croyaient qu'il était essentiel de rencontrer les joueurs et le personnel de soutien avant de partir pour le lieu du tournoi afin de réitérer et de préciser leurs rôles et leurs attentes, ce qui a permis à l'équipe de rester concentrer et d'éviter les distractions inutiles pendant le tournoi. Une fois le tournoi commencé, les entraîneurs croyaient qu'il était important pour eux-mêmes et pour leurs athlètes de gérer leurs émotions efficacement. Enfin, les participants ont estimé qu'il était important de se livrer à l'autoréflexion après chaque championnat national, car cela leur a permis d'évaluer et de modifier leurs compétences et leurs comportements d'entraîneur pour les saisons suivantes. En somme, cette étude ajoute à l'ensemble de la littérature sur l'expertise des entraîneurs en fournissant l'un des premiers portraits empiriques sur la façon dont les entraîneurs ont préparé leurs équipes pour les tournois des championnats nationaux. Les résultats de cette étude bénéficient les entraîneurs-chefs et les entraîneurs-adjoints en offrant des connaissances et des stratégies sur la façon de développer et maintenir une culture d'excellence dans les programmes de sport élite.

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"Success comes from knowing that you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming." – John Wooden

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The word *coaching* comes from the Hungarian word *kocsi*, a method of transportation in the city of Kocs in the 15th century (Flores, n.d.). Oxford University defined the word *coach* in 1830 as a tutor who guides a student through an exam (Morrison, 2010). The term first appeared in sport in 1861, but coaching did not emerge as a profession in the United States until the late 1980s (Results Coaching Systems, 2004). The establishment of coaching schools and federations such as the International Coach Federation increased the number of coaches in the United States and around the world (Results Coaching Systems, 2004). As the number of coaches began to increase worldwide, so too did research on the topic. Between 1970 and 2008, 872 articles on coaching science were published, including 113 devoted to coaching effectiveness (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Coaching effectiveness takes place both on and off the field of play (Bloom, Falcão, & Caron, 2014). Off the field, coaches use sport as a way to teach and instill important life skills (Duchesne, Bloom, & Sabiston, 2011; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). On the field, coaches' knowledge, organizational, and teaching skills influence athlete's performance and satisfaction (Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, & Chung, 2002; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001). Clearly, the interest of studying coaches has increased and has revealed different elements of being an effective coach.

American university coaches like Pat Summitt, John Wooden, Bear Bryant, Anson Dorrance, and Russ Rose have helped broaden the understanding of the knowledge and behaviours used by successful university coaches (Dorrance & Averbuch, 2012; Janssen & Dale, 2002; Puma, n.d.; Wooden, 1988; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). For instance, basketball coach Summitt, who won eight NCAA basketball titles, emphasized the importance of adopting an

athlete-centered coaching style based on respect and honesty, and being a good communicator

and listener (Janssen & Dale, 2002). Additionally, Coach Wooden, who won 10 NCAA National

Championships, constantly highlighted the importance of caring for players and teaching them to

always give their best. Furthermore, Paul "Bear" Bryant, football coach who won six National

Championships stated, "I don't want ordinary people. I want people who are willing to sacrifice

and do without a lot of those things ordinary people get to do. That's what it takes to win"

(Puma, n.d., para. 8). Similarly, Anson Dorrance, soccer coach who won 22 NCAA

Championships, encouraged and developed his players' competitive spirit during intense training

sessions (Dorrance, 1996). Finally, Russ Rose, volleyball coach at Penn State who won four

consecutive National Championships, stressed the importance of planning, establishing goals,

and having a vision. Furthermore, he believed that his team won four consecutive championships

because they were well prepared, worked well under pressure, and made good decisions

(Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Undoubtedly, successful coaches have a wide body of knowledge that

leads to successful behaviours that can influence team success.

Researchers have learned about great coaches by studying how their behaviours influence

athletes' performances (e.g., Gould et al., 1999; Grant & Schempp, 2013; Greenleaf et al., 2001;

Haneishi et al., 2007; Jedlic, Hall, Munroe-Chandler, & Hall, 2007; Mottaghi, Atarodi, &

Rohani, 2013; Orlick & Partington, 1988). For example, Greenleaf and colleagues (2001) found

that a coach's plans, management skills, and vision influenced athletes' and teams'

performances. More specifically, research has revealed that athletes' performance was influenced

by the development of pre-competition and competition plans and routines by their coaches, as

well as high-quality training sessions (Grant & Schempp, 2013; Greenleaf et al., 2001). In

particular, research has examined how coaches prepared themselves and their teams prior to

regular-season contests (e.g., Bloom, 1996; Bloom, Durand-Bush, & Salmela, 1997; Côté & Salmela, 1996). For example, Bloom and colleagues (1997) found that expert Canadian coaches had routines for themselves and their teams for the day of the game, which included team meetings, game plan rehearsal, and engagement in physical activity to help reduce stress and maintain a positive focus. Other sources of information have also revealed the importance of having pre-competition routines for the coaches and their athletes (e.g., Mechikoff & Kozar, 1983; Mellen, 1988; Wooden, 1988).

Winning one National Championship is a difficult task for any team, but winning several National Championships is extraordinary and very few coaches have accomplished this goal (Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Yukelson and Rose wrote a reflective report that outlined Coach Rose's perspective on winning multiple consecutive championship titles. According to the report, developing a plan to achieve consistency from year-to-year, instilling the program's values in athletes, and developing athletes' work ethic were all factors that Coach Rose believed contributed to his NCAA Division I volleyball team wining multiple National Championships. Although this report presented insightful information, it was limited to the perspective of one male NCAA coach and it did not provide information on coaches' personal preparations for a National Championship Tournament. Despite research indicating the importance of the coach's influence on athletes' performance (e.g., Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 2002), few studies have been devoted to understanding how coaches prepare themselves and their teams for National Championship Tournaments.

The coaching model (CM; Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995; Appendix A) was used as the theoretical framework to help guide this study and investigate the coaches' preparations for coaching at a National Championship Tournament. The CM illustrates how

coaches make use of their knowledge during the coaching process to reach their ultimate goal. The coaching process is divided into three *primary components*: *organization*, *training*, and *competition*. Organization has been defined as a crucial variable for the success of any individual or team sport and involves the coaches' ability to successfully prepare themselves, their athletes, and staff members (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, et al., 1995). Coaches' organizational skills also play an important role during training. Training includes the acquisition of physical, mental, tactical, and technical skills that will be employed in competition (Côté, 2006). During competition, coaches need to find the right balance between instructing and motivating their athletes. These primary components are influenced by the *coach's personal characteristics*, *athlete's personal characteristics*, and *contextual factors*, which are known as the *peripheral components*. Coaches' characteristics such as their beliefs and philosophies, motivational skills, and work ethic affect how successful their team can be during competitions (Bloom, 1996; Bloom & Salmela, 2000). Furthermore, athletes' characteristics such as their determination, concentration, and confidence will also affect how they relate to their coaches and perform during competition (Giacobbi, Roper, Whitney, & Butryn, 2002). Along the same line, contextual factors will also influence athletes' performance. For example, coaches of teams that have more financial support are able to prepare their athletes in a better-equipped environment, which might lead to better practices and better chances for success at competitions. In the present study, the CM was used to conceptualize coaches' knowledge by examining how the primary and peripheral components were involved in their preparations for National Championship Tournaments.

The purpose of this study was to investigate highly successful Canadian university coaches' perceptions on how they prepared themselves and their teams for continued success at

National Championship Tournaments. The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- What do coaches believe are the critical elements for success at a National Championship Tournament?

- Do successful coaches change their training plans (i.e., mental, tactical, physical, technical, team building preparations) after qualifying for the Championship Tournament? If so, how? And in what ways?

- How do coaches organize themselves, their assistant coaches, and their athletes for the Championship Tournament?

- How do coaches acquire the knowledge they need to prepare their teams for success at Championship Tournaments?

Significance of the Study

Despite an increased number of publications in coaching science, there is limited empirical research on how coaches develop and maintain programs that achieve continuous success at high-level competitions. As such, this study provided one of the first empirical accounts regarding how some of the most successful university coaches in Canada prepared themselves and their teams for National Championship Tournaments. Additionally, the participants described the ways in which they acquired their coaching knowledge, which included continuous self-reflection and seeking peer mentors. Results from this study provided important insights to current and aspiring head and assistant coaches about the day-to-day preparation involved in maintaining a successful sports program. Current and aspiring coaches may also benefit from learning how successful coaches managed their own as well as their players' emotions during important competitions. Finally, results from this study may be

applicable to domains outside of sports (e.g., organizational psychology), as the coaches discussed the ways in which they developed and maintained a culture of excellence with their teams.

Delimitations

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

1. Participants had a minimum of five years head coaching experience at a university level.
2. Participants were head coaches of interacting team sports.
3. Participants were coaches who participated in at least four National Championship Tournaments, and won at least one of them.

Limitations

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

1. Results may only be applicable to interacting team sports.
2. Results may only be relevant to university head coaches in the Canadian Interuniversity Sport.
3. Results were based on the coaches' perceptions of their personal experiences, which may differ from athletes' perceptions.
4. Results may only apply to National Championship Tournaments in Canada.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following operational definitions were used:

Successful coaches: Coaches who have a minimum of five years experience coaching at a university level and who have participated in at least four National Championship Tournaments and won at least one of them.

National Championship Tournament: The winning teams from regional conference tournaments in Canada compete in a tournament to determine the best team in the nation. The number of teams in the tournament differs between sports. In the present study, the term *National Championship Tournament* will be used to describe all games played during the Canadian championship, including the final game.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Coaching Knowledge

Research in coaching science has extensively investigated coaching knowledge and the acquisition of this knowledge (e.g., Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2006; Gould, Giannini, Krane, & Hodge, 1990; Irwin, Hanton, & Kerwin, 2004). The knowledge of the coach influences how coaches plan, conduct, and evaluate the training programs for their teams (Irwin et al., 2004), which in turn, could determine the success of their teams. Despite the extensive research devoted to coaches' knowledge acquisition, Nelson, Cushion, and Potrac (2006) stated that "our understanding of coach learning and the acquisition of professional knowledge lacks a clear conceptual base" (p. 247). With this in mind, the authors suggested the use of *coach learning* when referring to the process of the acquisition of coaching knowledge.

Nelson et al. (2006) divided the sources of knowledge acquisition into *formal*, *nonformal*, and *informal* learning. Hodkinson, Colley, and Malcolm (2003) defined formal learning as the acquisition of knowledge that takes place within educational institutions. Formal learning involves certification programs, such as university degrees or coaching certification programs. According to Nelson and colleagues the formal learning programs have been criticized because they see coaching as a systematic process, where coaches learn about the science of the sport but "have little appreciation of pedagogical and socio-cultural aspects relating to the coach's role in the coaching process" (p. 249). Despite this, they also noted that these programs have contributed to coaches' feelings of being efficacious in influencing the performance of their athletes. Nonformal learning is the acquisition of knowledge within organizations where the learners are the ones who choose the topics they want to be lectured on (Heimlich, 1993).

Nonformal learning includes conferences, seminars, and workshops. Unlike formal learning, nonformal learning focuses on specific topics of interest and are shorter in duration. Hodkinson et al. (2003) defined informal learning as the acquisition of knowledge through everyday experiences within non-educational settings. Informal sources involve more self-directed methods of learning, such as learning from own experiences, exchanging information, or learning from other coaches. The latter has been considered one of the main sources of informal learning (Nelson et al., 2006). According to Nelson et al., the informal sources have more impact on the coaches' experiences of learning.

Coaches' knowledge influences how they organize and prepare their teams for competition. Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, and Russell (1995) proposed the coaching model (CM), which explains how coaches make use of their knowledge to reach their ultimate goal, which is to train athletes to compete successfully. This model represents the coach's mental model of the athletes' potential, which is influenced by what are called the peripheral components: coach's personal characteristics, athletes' personal characteristics, and contextual factors. These peripheral components further influence the three primary components: organization, training, and competition. For example, the primary components will be affected by the ever-changing situations in the coach's personal life, the coach's beliefs, the ability of the athletes, and unstable factors such as the judges or weather conditions. The CM provides a description of the several ways that the coaches' knowledge can be implemented in different situations. For example, a coach will have a different technical approach for an elite athlete than for an intermediate athlete. The main factors involved in the coaching process and the importance of their interaction can be explained through this model.

Primary Components

  Organization. The organization component of the CM involves the use of the coaches'

knowledge in arranging the ideal plans for the team to train and compete, while taking into

consideration further responsibilities such as working with staff members, working with the

athletes' families, and helping the athletes with their personal problems, which are all involved in

the process of reaching their goal (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, et al., 1995). The extensive research

done on expert coaches and their achievements present organization as a "crucial variable for the

success of any individual or team sport" (Bloom, 2002, p. 452). For example, an essential aspect

of organization for coaches includes the establishment of daily, weekly, monthly, and seasonal

goals. Furthermore, the coaches determine what they need to achieve the goal and how they will

achieve it (Bloom, 2002). For example, Côté and Salmela (1996) described that planning training

involved a yearlong preparation. During this time, there are specific months devoted to

improving techniques and learning routines, and another period of time is specifically devoted to

competitions. Other tasks included in the coaches' plans were to set rules for outside and inside

the training environment, and the establishment of long-term, short-term, and flexible goals

(Côté & Salmela, 1996). Team sport coaches experience other organizational components like

team selection, team rules, and building team cohesion.

  Planning and having a vision are organizational components for both individual and

team sport coaches (Bloom, 2002). The vision is the coach's plan for what he/she wants his/her

team to accomplish (Vallée & Bloom, 2005). As postulated by Bloom (2002), the vision is the

most important component of organization. Coaches need to begin every season by having a

clear mission. The coach needs to transmit the mission to their team; this way the team can work

together towards achieving a common goal (Bloom, 2002). For example, Vallée and Bloom

found that the vision and organizational skills were crucial in helping expert university coaches build their programs. They also found that the vision influenced the organizational skills that the coaches would implement. Therefore, the vision guided every action of the coach (Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Vallée and Bloom explained that the vision involved the coaches' target and how they planned to achieve it, which was consistent with Desjardins' (1996) explanation of vision. Desjardins explained that expert coaches transformed their visions into mission statements, which led the team to achieve their training plans and their goal. Additionally, under organizational skills, Vallée and Bloom found two main subcomponents that facilitated the coaches' success: planning and management/administration. Under planning, coaches included establishing a seasonal plan, organizing practices, and making sure their athletes were ready for a game. Furthermore, coaches mentioned that they have to deal with different tasks such as fund-raising and recruiting athletes, which are part of the management/administration responsibilities.

Greenleaf, Gould, and Dieffenbach (2001) interviewed Olympic athletes and found that one of the factors that positively influenced performance was the coach's plan. A gold medalist described the importance of having a coach who constantly clarifies the athlete's roles and who has a well-established physical and mental preparation plan. Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, and Peterson (1999) interviewed Olympic athletes and coaches and compared successful teams with unsuccessful ones. They found that the teams that met or exceeded performance expectations had coaches who had excellent time management skills, had a detailed vision of a plan for peak performance for the Olympic games, and made no changes to that plan. Coaches from teams that failed to meet performance expectations pointed out that a negative factor influencing their performance was "a lack of planning or failure to follow the plans" (Gould et al., 1999, p. 388). In some cases the plans were implemented too late, which suggests

the importance of having a vision from the beginning of the season so that the team has time to

assimilate the plan. Other teams that failed to meet performance expectations mentioned that last

minute changes made by the coach affected an athletes' confidence. A study by Orlick and

Partington (1988) revealed a similar finding. They interviewed Canadian Olympic athletes and

found that the athletes perceived last-minute changes made by the coaches as performance

blocks. Overall, coaches who take into consideration the broad spectrum of responsibilities they

have to encounter before the season starts will have a base to develop appropriate training

sessions and ideally successful performances and championships. Finally, organization involves

the implementation of the coaches' knowledge to plan training and competition based on their

vision, which consequently influences the athletes' performance.

Training. The training component of the CM involves applying the coaches' knowledge

to help athletes develop and execute various technical and tactical skills (Côté, Salmela, &

Russell, 1995). Côté (2006) described six variables from the training component: the intervention

style of the coach, the technical skills, the mental skills, the moral and social skills, the tactical

skills, and the physical conditioning. Côté, Salmela, and Russell (1995) examined how expert

gymnastic coaches created and ran optimal training practices. Among their findings they found

different coaching styles for training when dealing with male and female gymnasts. For example,

coaches training male gymnasts believed that the best approach was being dictatorial and using

peer pressure, whereas training female gymnasts involved keeping some distance from the

gymnasts and asking quality training. With respect to the technical skills, the coaches'

knowledge was based on teaching the skills in a progressive manner, with the purpose of

minimizing the gymnasts' fear. Furthermore, the coaches considered coaching mental skills to be

important for training and competition. These coaches believed that mental skills are developed

while training and will help the athletes deal with different vexed thoughts and feelings,

especially stress and anxiety. Consequently, the coaches taught the athletes to have positive

thoughts, and to recognize and differentiate between the things they could control and the things

that they could not control when performing. Additionally, the coaches believed that during the

training period athletes should be capable of recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, as this

will help with the athletes' motivation. Finally, the simulation category encompasses the

coaches' knowledge on the appropriateness of competition simulation during practice. The

coaches believed that simulation better prepares athletes mentally and technically for

competition by creating scenarios similar to the ones the athletes will face in competition.

Studies have found that quality training including competition simulation is a common factor

amongst successful athletes and teams (e.g., Orlick & Partington, 1988; Yukelson & Rose,

2014).

As athletes progress throughout their career, training becomes more central for the athlete

and for the coach. Throughout their career, athletes go through different stages: the sampling

years, the specializing years, the investment years, and the maintenance years (Durand-Bush &

Salmela, 2002). Training becomes a crucial component during the investment and maintenance

years (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). During the investment years, training involves physical,

mental, technical, and tactical components (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002), where athletes

engage in more physical training and value their mental and tactical training more than in the

previous stages. Durand-Bush and Salmela stated that during the investment years "training was

done with a higher level of awareness and quality" (p. 160). Because the athletes were so

immersed in training and competition at this stage, they spent considerably more time with their

coach than they did before. Durand-Bush and Salmela stated that coaches were a crucial factor

because at this point in time athletes are about to achieve their highest levels of success. The athletes revealed that once they reached their pinnacle (i.e., maintenance years), they kept working on their techniques and their mental preparation because they believed there was room for improvement.

Gould et al. (1999) reported that focusing too much on the athletes' physical training and not enough on their mental training was a common factor for teams that did not meet their performance expectations. Gould and colleagues also found that overtraining was a factor that negatively influenced the athletes' performance from two teams that were highly favoured to win at the Olympics but failed to do so. The athletes of these teams pointed out the need for mental training and the coach reported the necessity of adequate mental training for optimal performance. On the other hand, athletes from teams that met or exceeded performance expectations reported that a positive factor that influenced their performance was a "delicate blend between a demanding training schedule and appropriate breaks" (Gould et al., 1999, p. 382).

Gould and Maynard (2009) reviewed research literature on Olympic performance and found an association between optimal physical training and Olympic success; however, "there is a fine line between training intensely to gain an edge over your opponents and doing too much and overtraining" (p. 1402). Gould and Maynard also reported that teams that spent more time training together, whether at residency programmes or training camps, were more successful than those teams that did not spend as much time together. Yukelson and Rose (2014) interviewed the head coach of a NCAA team that won four consecutive National Championships and postulated that the best time to get the athletes mentally and tactically prepared was during practice time. Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton (2007) interviewed elite athletes who had won at least one gold

medal at the Olympics or world championships and coaches who had coached Olympic or world champions. The athletes reported that when training got tough, they reminded themselves of why they were training hard and used their long-term goals as a way of motivating themselves. While training, the athletes recognized that they were tired but they kept working and remained patient and disciplined. Furthermore, these athletes tried to have the best practice every time. Even if the training environment was not ideal, they used "every aspect of the training environment to one's advantage" (Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2007, p. 254). Based on these findings, it is evident that training for high-level sport competitions encompasses both physical and mental training for optimal performance.

      Competition. The competition component involves the coaches' knowledge on how to help their athletes perform in competition (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, et al., 1995). Chelladurai (2011) described competition as an "essential component of both pursuit of pleasure and pursuit of excellence" (p. 8), where pursuit of pleasure is the enjoyment of the sport and pursuit of excellence is the demonstration than an athlete is superior to others. Côté, Salmela, and Russell (1995) identified three categories that fall into a competition scenario for gymnasts: competition floor, competition site, and trial competitions. Competition floor refers to what coaches do immediately before, during, and after a competition. The coaches acted as a spectator and they did not teach their athletes new techniques during this time. Competition site refers to the time (i.e., weekend, week, day) before and after a competition. The coaches of male gymnasts applied their competition site knowledge by talking to their athletes the night before a competition to clarify any pressing issues or to answer any last-minute questions. This allowed the coach to control for distractions. Finally, the trial competition is defined as the "real competition that the

gymnasts participated in to help them become more confident and improve their skills" (Côté, Salmela, & Russell, 1995, p. 81).

In a similar manner, Bloom (2002) divided coaches' roles into pre-competition, during competition, and post-competition. Bloom defined the pre-competition routines of coaches as the tasks that took place from the moment they woke up on the day of the game until right before the game started. During this time, the coaches focused on both their athletes' preparations and their own preparations. In fact, Bloom, Durand-Bush, and Salmela (1997) examined the pregame preparations of expert team sport coaches and they included proceedings from pregame meals to the pregame pep talk. The coaches also prepared themselves mentally and physically before the game. For example, the coaches had a mental rehearsal of what they expected to happen during the upcoming game and how they would respond to these challenges. In a similar manner, Fletcher (2006) studied the behaviours of coaches of the Australian Basketball Association and their athletes' perceptions on their coaches' behaviours in the hour before a game. Fletcher stated that the pre-game preparations during this hour were an extension of their training. Fletcher found that the coaches considered themselves as part of the team and believed that their own behaviour and preparation could influence their athletes' performance. The athletes also believed that the coach was the central figure in establishing the optimal conditions before the game. More specifically, the athletes perceived the coaches to be a potential factor to positively or negatively influence their performance.

During competition, Fletcher (2006) found that the athletes saw the coach as positively influencing their performance, by affecting their motivation, confidence, and anxiety. In contrast, the athletes believed that the coach was a factor that negatively influenced their performance when they could perceive the coach was anxious, when the coach put a lot of pressure on them

right before the game, when the coach changed the plans, or when the coach talked too much before their performance. Furthermore, Fletcher found that the coaches planned their pre-game preparations to establish optimal conditions to encourage the athletes to be focused on their goals. For example, the coaches used mental and physical pre-game routines for the team and for each athlete, they had team meetings, individual coach-athlete interactions, and they were prepared to control unexpected events. The athletes pointed out that having structured routines helped their mental state and their performance.

During competition, team sport coaches still have significant responsibilities. For example, they interact with their athletes during time-outs, they have to make appropriate use of the intermission breaks, and make appropriate substitutions during the game (Bloom, 2002). This is different from what Côte and colleagues (1995) found because they explored the competition time for individual sport coaches only. Jones and colleagues (2007) found that coaches believed that "competition is an ever-changing physical state, which you have to adapt to mentally, and the mentally tough performer can adapt whatever" (p. 255). With this in mind, coaches considered the ability to cope and adapt for distractions and changes to be important for athletes, because only those with this ability will have an optimal performance.

After a game is often when coaches will reflect on the performance of themselves and their teams. Bloom (1996) reported that elite coaches engaged in post-game routines that helped them deal with their emotions before talking with their players. For example, some coaches talked to their assistant coaches, while others analyzed the game statistics before talking to their teams. Coaches believed the period after a game was an important learning opportunity and this period of reflection helped them make changes to their subsequent precompetition and

competition plans. Not surprisingly, the research discussed above shows that the primary components of the CM are critical variables that affect athletes and team success.

Peripheral Components

Coach's Personal Characteristics. The coach's personal characteristics involve the coach's philosophy, perceptions, beliefs, or personal life that could influence the primary components (Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Côté et al., 1995). There are four main characteristics that will be discussed in this section: (a) finding the right coaching style, (b) work ethic, (c) motivation to learn, and (d) reflective learner.

Research on athletes' performance has suggested that the personality and leadership of a coach can either enhance or diminish athletes' performance and satisfaction (Terry, 1984). Bloom (1996) described several characteristics identified in successful coaches, such as finding the right coaching style. Coaches need to identify who they are before they develop their coaching style (Bloom, 1996). For instance, some coaches are more autocratic than others, some are quiet, and some tend to yell more often. Therefore, coaches should try and match their personality with their coaching style. Additionally, coaches should consider different factors such as the situation and athletes' gender, age, culture, and competitive level (e.g., Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004; Terry, 1984; Turman, 2001). For example, Turman studied the coaching style of varsity coaches throughout a season and found that the coaches showed different coaching styles depending on the athlete's year of experience and at the beginning, middle, and end of the season.

The athlete-centered coaching style is an approach that sees the athlete "as the focal point, and, as such, the organizational structure and decision-making process have been adapted to support and respond to the needs, values, and objectives of athletes" (Kihl, Kikulis, &

Thibault, 2007, p. 2). By implementing an athlete-centered coaching style, coaches are able to develop their athletes' psychological, physical, and social well-being in addition to developing the athletes' technical and tactical skills. In other words, an athlete-centered coaching style aims for the holistic development of the athletes (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Successful coaches want to develop responsible, self-disciplined individuals who can adequately administer their priorities (Bloom, 1996; Duchesne et al., 2011; Falcão, Bloom, & Gilbert, 2012; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Expert coaches have demonstrated the importance of guiding their athletes to pursue performance and personal excellence, in other words, the importance of the holistic development of athletes (e.g., Bloom, Falcão, Caron, 2014; Duchesne et al., 2011; Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Wooden, 1988). For instance, Duchesne and colleagues studied intercollegiate coaches and their experiences with international athletes. They found that the coaches enhanced their athletes' holistic development by establishing a "positive coach/international athlete relationship" (p. 15), which involved a high level of trust and respect. Moreover, Vallée and Bloom found that expert coaches demonstrated they cared about their athletes and were interested in the athletes' lives by talking with them about things outside their sport. Additionally, in an athlete-centered coaching style, athletes take part in the decision-making process, which helps build a trustful coach-athlete relationship (Headley-Cooper, 2010). Overall, it can be concluded that the athlete-centered coaching style aims to develop athletes to excel in their sport and in life (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2006).

Other coach's personal characteristics include their work ethic and their motivation to learn (Bloom, 1996; Bloom & Salmela, 2000). Coaches with a strong work ethic believe that they need to do their job and work hard by sacrificing other personal activities, like family time (Bloom & Salmela, 2000). These coaches believe that success is attributable to hard work

(Bloom, 1996). However, working hard is not always enough to be a successful coach. It also requires a tremendous level of motivation to learn (Bloom, 1996). Kaplan (1992) studied senior managers and found a specific character type called *expansive* which was defined as a "strong ambition to occupy a bigger than average place in life through high achievement" (p. 308). Based on Kaplan's explanation of expansive individuals, successful coaches are individuals who are characterized by a unique determination for mastery and motivation to learn and to push themselves and others to work hard to achieve their goals. Jones and Spooner (2006) studied sports and business performers and found common characteristics of high achievers. Jones and Spooner found that high achievers are "a sponge for information" (p. 44) and are always looking for new information that will help them advance. Successful coaches have a persisting aspiration to keep growing as a coach even after getting to the top of their profession (Bloom & Salmela, 2000). In a similar manner, Bloom identified the coach's desire for acquiring knowledge as one of the main characteristics of their success. Coaches believed that they should constantly update their tactics and strategies in order for their teams to be ahead.

Research has supported that "expertise in coaching is based on the mental skills and knowledge that coaches have available rather than their behaviour in any given situation" (Knowles, Borrie, & Telfer, 2005, p. 1712). One of the most important sources of knowledge acquisition of expert coaches is informal learning. As alluded to previously, informal learning is based on the coaches' personal experiences. It is this method of learning that has "made the greatest contributions to their ongoing development as coaches" (Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009, p. 329). Informal sources involve the development of *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal knowledge*, which have been suggested as an asset for expert coaches (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Interpersonal knowledge will allow the coaches to interact properly and communicate

successfully with their athletes and other people, such as the athletes' families and team directors. Intrapersonal knowledge, on the other hand, will allow the coaches to reflect on their training plans, which in turn, will help the coaches improve their practices and competition outcomes.

A large body of research has examined coaches' knowledge acquisition and has found that one of the coaches' primary sources of knowledge acquisition and development is their own experiences as athletes and early coaching experiences (e.g., Cregan, Bloom, & Reid, 2007; Erickson, Côté, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Gilbert, Côté, & Mallett, 2006; Gould et al., 1990; Salmela, 1994). For example, Salmela investigated elite coaches and found that experience was their primary learning source, although Carter and Bloom (2009) found it was possible to acquire knowledge from sources other than athletic experiences. Carter and Bloom found that coaches who surpassed their athletic achievements developed their knowledge through different ways, including observing and interacting with other coaches.

Effective coaching is based on "a combination of practical coaching experience followed by a period of critical reflection" (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 1713). Because reflecting on personal experience has been widely supported to be successful, Knowles and colleagues suggested that coach education should include programs that aim to develop coaches' ability to reflect on their experiences. Mallett and colleagues (2009) stated that coaches believe that they learn more from informal situations. Informal learning gives coaches the opportunity to consult any type of topic relevant to the coaches' needs. However, Galvin (1998) suggested that in practice, there is a lack of connection between formal and informal learning (as cited in Knowles, Tyler, Gilbourne, & Eubank, 2006). For example, the absence of guidance in informal learning may result in lack of information quality. On the other hand, formal learning does not include opportunities for

coaches to experience reflective learning (Knowles et al., 2005; Mallett et al., 2009). Therefore, Mallet and colleagues have suggested that informal learning "can be ameliorated by elements of structured mentoring" (p. 332). In a similar manner, Knowles and colleagues posited that coaching programmes would greatly benefit from including opportunities to maximize coaches' experiential learning. This way, coaches could have a guided opportunity to learn to explore and reflect on their behaviours. Lyle (2002) proposed that coach education should "enable the coach to move beyond existing practice, to innovate, to experiment, to adapt, to reflect, and to build underpinning knowledge and skills for the requirements of 'higher levels' of coaching" (as cited in Knowles et al., 2005, p. 1719).

A personal characteristic that helps coaches excel is their ability to reflect, evaluate, and adjust their strategies and training plans. Effective elite sport coaching is based on the coaches' reflection and evaluation of their experiences (Saury & Durand, 1998). Reflection has been described as " 'meta thinking' (thinking about thinking) in which we consider the relationship between our thoughts and action in a particular context" (Kemmis, 1985, p. 141). More specifically, coaches have described reflective practice as "a form of analysis, a process of evaluation and an improvement tool to produce a change in practice" (Knowles et al., 2006, p. 169). Research has shown the importance of reflecting upon practice because it provides an opportunity for coaches to identify areas in practice and competition that need to be improved and allows them to develop new ideas for change (Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Neville, 2001). Throughout their careers, successful coaches learn to be reflective learners, as this personal knowledge will serve as an essential tool for their decision-making skills (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Knowles et al., 2005). Coaches reflect on the earlier stages of their careers to improve and update their coaching methods to better fit the current needs of the athletes (Côté &

Gilbert, 2009). Reflective practice is imperative for coaches' success because coaches are able to develop new understanding and intrapersonal appreciation (Knowles et al., 2006).

James and Clarke (1994) suggested that reflective practice involves a technical, practical, and critical level. Technical reflection involves the evaluation of the "mechanical aspects of practice" (Knowles et al., 2006, p. 173). For example, changing the team strategy. Practical reflection refers to the evaluation of the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Knowles et al., 2006). Lastly, critical reflection refers to the coach's concern with social, political, and economic factors influencing the coach's and athletes' development and performance (Knowles et al., 2006). By reflecting on these three levels, coaches will be able to expand their knowledge to improve their own and their athletes' performance. Finally, the coaches' personal characteristics interact with the athlete's personal characteristics in order for coaches to successfully develop their athletes.

Athlete's Personal Characteristics. Research in athletic success has extensively investigated the factors that influence athletes' performance (e.g., Burton, VanHeest, Rallis, & Reis, 2006; Giacobbi, Roper, Whitney, & Butryn, 2002; Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002). Among these factors, the athletes' personal characteristics have been considered one of the most influential for athletes' success. For instance, Giacobbi et al. interviewed NCAA Division I coaches and found that these coaches believed that the athletes' personal characteristics were "the most important determinant of athletic success" (p. 169). The athlete's personal characteristics included the athlete's stage of learning, abilities, and other aptitudes such as level of motivation, that could influence coaching and success (Côté et al., 1995). Different studies have reported a great variety of athletes' characteristics important for their skill improvement and performance. For example, Kuchenbecker (1999) studied coaches' perspectives on the

characteristics that helped athletic success at a competitive level. The coaches revealed that the most important features for the athletes' improvement and success were having a positive attitude and being coachable (as cited in Giacobbi et al., 2002). Other studies have shown that those athletes who are hard workers, committed to training, organized, and receptive to coaching are the ones who improve the most and reach elite levels of performance (Giacobbi et al., 2002; Gould et al., 2002). Besides these characteristics, successful athletes have also been described as self-confident, motivated, highly independent, determined, and competitive (Burton et al., 2006; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). Related to the current study, the personal characteristics that have shown to be important for elite athletes' success, and that will be discussed in this section are: (a) motivation, (b) mental toughness, and (c) coachability.

Durand-Bush and Salmela (2002) found that during the maintenance years, athletes were always motivated to learn and to improve. The athletes reported the importance of learning and acquiring new skills and tactics for them to be ahead of their rival competitors. Motivation to learn has also been identified as a personal characteristic of gifted individuals and high achievers (e.g., Burton et al., 2006; Jones & Spooner, 2006). For instance, Jones and Spooner reported that high achievers are particularly interested in every opportunity that will further their knowledge and performance. At this level, athletes also have a great motivation to train and to compete. Giacobbi and colleagues (2002) found that the coaches believed that successful athletes had a "burning desire to be the best" (p. 170) and that was what allowed them to put all the sacrifice, time, and dedication needed to be at the top of their sport. Yukelson and Rose (2014) reported that one of the key components of building high performance championship teams is recruiting athletes that have "the desire and mindset of wanting to be good" (p. 47).

Another personal characteristic that allows athletes to excel is mental toughness, which

Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton (2007) defined as:

> Having the natural or developed psychological edge that enables you to, generally, cope better than your opponents with the many demands (competition, training, lifestyle) that sport places on a performer and, specifically, be more consistent and better than your opponents in remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure. (p. 247)

More specifically, some aspects of mental toughness include: self-confidence, energy control (i.e., handling emotions such as frustration), attention control, visualization and imagery control, and attitude control (Golby & Sheard, 2004). Research on athletic success has constantly identified mental toughness as a fundamental component of high-achieving athletes (Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2007). For example, Gould, Hodge, Peterson, and Petlichkoff (1987) found that more than 80% of the coaches reported mental toughness as the mental skill that determines wrestling success. Gould, Dieffenbach, and Moffett (2002) found mental toughness to be the most-cited characteristic as a fundamental component for performers' excellence. For instance, Taylor, Gould, and Rolo (2008) studied Olympic athletes and compared medalists' and non-medalists' psychological skills. They found that medalists had higher emotional control than non-medalists. Another study by Orlick and Partington (1988) found that athletes considered attention control and imagery use as factors that influenced peak performance. In a similar manner, Robazza and Bortoli (1998) found that confidence, emotional control, and imagery use were considered critical strategies for Olympic athletes successful performances.

Finally, during the process of coaching, coaches discover the different ways in which each athlete learns and performs better (Giacobbi et al., 2002; Gilbert, Gilbert, & Trudel, 2001). Therefore, coaches develop different tactics to approach each individual athlete. For example,

some athletes respond better to one on one communication whereas other athletes may respond better when the coach yells at them (Giacobbi et al., 2002). Despite the different ways in which each athlete learns and improves his or her performance, coaches have reported that athletes who are coachable allow both the coaches and the athletes to improve and achieve excellence. Coaches believe that coaching is more efficacious with those athletes who listen to their coaches, trust their coaches, are inquisitive, and are open to advice from different sources (Giacobbi et al., 2002). Furthermore, athletes who are considered coachable, allow coaching to be more efficient because they follow their coaches' instructions and advice. However, for athletes to be coachable, they need to trust their coaches' knowledge and competence (Jones & Spooner, 2006). For instance, Olympic athletes have reported the importance of respecting the capability of the coach (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, & Chung, 2002). Furthermore, Olympic athletes and coaches believe that the athlete's trust in the coaches' knowledge and experience, the coach's ability to establish trust with the athletes, and the athletes' confidence that the coach is aware of their needs are important factors that influence performance (Gould et al., 2002).

The athletes' personal characteristics are critical features for the athletes' development because these will either facilitate or impede coaching. Athletes who are highly motivated, are mentally tough, and are coachable will facilitate coaching by allowing their practice time to flow, and consequently, their competition time to be effective. Both athletes' and coaches' personal characteristics influence a coach's efficiency and success (Gilbert et al., 2001). Overall, the athletes' personal characteristics will affect coaching by allowing or inhibiting a smooth process during practice and in competition. Other features called the contextual factors will further influence this process.

Contextual Factors. The contextual factors include aspects that cannot be controlled by the coaches or by the athletes but remain important, such as the referees, the crowd, or access to financial resources (e.g., Allen & Jones, 2014; Bray & Widmeyer, 2000; Côté et al., 1995; Davies, Bloom, & Salmela, 2005). Despite this, there are only a few studies that have investigated the influence of contextual factors on coaching athletes (Bloom et al., 2014). The contextual factors that will be discussed in this section are: (a) sources of support for the athletes and the coach, and (b) home advantage.

Athletes and coaches have identified their families as one of the factors that has influenced their development and that has supported them in their careers (Bloom, 2002; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). During the investment years, parents provide the athletes with financial and emotional support (Baker, Horton, Robertson-Wilson, & Wall, 2003). Because this period in the athletes' career demands a high amount of practice, parents are essential in providing support to help their child with injuries, pressure, and fatigue. Baker et al. highlighted that "parental support helps expert performers and elite athletes deal with the demands of the sustained deliberate practice necessary to reach an expert level of performance" (p. 6).

Another source of support is the university and societal support. Those university teams who receive more funding will be better equipped, which in turn, will facilitate skill acquisition and perhaps enhance performance (Bloom, 2002; Davies et al., 2005). Furthermore, the fact that some countries value different sports more than others will have an effect on the training resources and on the extrinsic motivation of the athletes, which in turn, will influence their performance (Baker & Horton, 2004). For instance, Canada is known for producing hockey stars because there is a large amount of resources that facilitate practicing this sport; one of those facilitators is the climate. Consequently, there is a great number of athletes participating in this

sport. Support is a factor that will influence athletes and coaches throughout their career, for training and competition.

Another contextual factor that influences athletes' performance is home advantage. Home advantage refers to the "higher probability of success when playing at home than away from home" (Legaz-Arrese, Moliner-Urdiales, & Munguía-Izquierdo, 2013, p. 4). Home advantage has been well documented in sports literature (e.g., Bray & Widmeyer, 2000; Carré, Muir, Belanger, & Putnam, 2006; Legaz-Arrese et al., 2013; Nevill & Holder, 1999; Pollard, 1986). Based on the literature reviewed by Legaz-Arrese and colleagues, they identified five main causes of home advantage: (a) influence of the crowd, (b) familiarity with the venue, (c) travelling, (d) rule factors, and (e) territoriality. Bray and Widmeyer found that athletes believed that the home crowd influenced the teams' chances of winning. Research suggests that the influence of the crowd depends on the type of sport, the crowd noise and size, and the proximity to the athletes, as these factors can affect the mood states and concentration of athletes, coaches, and referees (Legaz-Arrese et al., 2013). Furthermore, players have revealed that familiarity with the venue, such as lightning, boards, rim tension, and baskets influenced their performances (Bray & Widmeyer, 2000). Also, not having to travel prior to the game positively influenced athletes' performance (Bray & Widmeyer, 2000; Reilly, Waterhouse, & Edwards, 2005). Travelling before a game affects athletes because of fatigue and disruption of their customary routines (Legaz-Arrese et al., 2013).

Other studies have focused on referee bias (Ansorge & Scheer, 1988; Downward & Jones, 2007; Seltzer & Glass, 1991). Results indicated that referees showed behaviours that favoured the home team (e.g., fewer yellow and red cards, more extra time, more free kicks), which might be due to the effect of the crowd on the referees' decisions (Legaz-Arrese et al.,

2013). Finally, territoriality refers to the feeling of defending the home ground. This factor

influences athletes' performance because when playing at home, the athletes' competitive level

increases, resulting in superior performance (Carré, 2009; Legaz-Arrese et al., 2013). Generally,

athletes have reported that their teams have been more successful in their overall performance

when they played at home (Bray & Widmeyer, 2000). Based on these findings, the coach's

personal characteristics, the athlete's personal characteristics, and the contextual factors are

imperative components that influence the primary components of the CM in order to help

athletes achieve optimal performance.

Chapter 3

Methods

The first section of this chapter includes a brief explanation of qualitative research methods, focusing on the methodology employed in the current study. Following this, the participants and recruitment procedure will be described. Finally, the data gathering process, the interview guide, data analysis procedures, and trustworthiness will be discussed.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is considered an interpretive approach where the main goal is to understand how individuals interpret their lives through interactions with their surroundings (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative researchers collect data using different techniques, such as observations, recordings, documents, and interviews (Creswell, 2013). In particular, in-depth interviews allow researchers to communicate with individuals and acquire detailed information based on their lived experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During interviews, the researcher is able to investigate and understand a topic or phenomenon not only through conversing with participants but also through nonverbal forms of communication (i.e., facial expressions, tone of voice). A more detailed description of the interview process and the interview guide will be explained in the data gathering section in this chapter.

In qualitative studies, the researcher is considered the main instrument for data collection and analysis. The researchers attempt to gather and interpret information that will best answer their research questions. As posited by Barrett (2007), "data analysis and interpretation are often intertwined and rely upon the researcher's logic, artistry, imagination, clarity, and knowledge of the field under study" (p. 418). This is why the researchers' position in the investigation, their past experiences and values can have an influence on how they interpret and deliver the results.

Merriam (2002) suggested that it is important for the researchers to identify these "subjectivities," and report and monitor them throughout the collection and interpretation of data. Therefore, qualitative researchers clearly state their philosophical beliefs in their research. With this in mind, the current study used a *social constructivist* framework, which aims to understand and give meaning to the participants' views of a specific situation related to their own experiences (Creswell, 2013). For the current study, the researchers were interested in understanding how the coaches continue to achieve success at National Championship Tournaments.

Methodology

In addition to stating their philosophical beliefs, qualitative researchers should posit and follow a qualitative research approach that best answers their research questions (Creswell, 2013). A case study was used to guide the current study. A case study is a process of inquiry in which "the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system" (Stake, 2000, p. 436). Stake proposes three types of case study: (a) *instrumental case study*, (b) *intrinsic case study*, and (c) *collective case study.* For the current study, an instrumental case study was used to answer the research questions. An instrumental case study is utilized when a case is used as a way to understand a broader issue. Stake noted that, in an instrumental case study, "the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else" (p. 437). For example, Nelson and Cushion (2006) were interested in exploring the use of reflection as a conceptual framework to understand the connection between coach education, theory, and practice. The case was identified as a United Kingdom sporting National Governing Body (NGB) that was in the process of developing a coach education program. The researchers reviewed documents provided by the NGB on course designs, course content, delivery methods,

and tutor's role. Additionally, the researchers observed a panel meeting comprised of five of the NGB employees, and interviewed two of the employees who were in charge of constructing the education program. Studying this case helped the researchers to investigate the use of reflection as a framework to connect coach education, theory, and practice. In a similar manner, for the current study the case was identified as a distinctive group of highly successful university coaches who have won numerous National titles to help the researchers explore the preparations behind winning a National Championship Tournament and understand how these coaches have maintained such successful programs.

Participants

Six highly successful Canadian university coaches participated in the current study. The participants were the head coaches of Canadian interacting male and female university sport teams. They had been in their current coaching position for at least five years, had participated in at least four National Championship Tournaments, had coached in at least three National Championship games, and had won at least one National Championship title. Together, the participants had combined to win 16 Canadian Interuniversity Sport coach of the year awards and more than 30 National titles. The participants' average age was 47 at the time of the interviews.

Procedures

Approval was obtained from our university's research ethics board prior to contacting participants. The lead investigator conducted an online search for successful Canadian university coaches based on the number of National Championships they had won. After conferring with the other two investigators of this study, participants who met the selection criteria were contacted by e-mail using a recruitment script (Appendix B). Coaches who agreed to participate

in this study selected a mutually agreeable time and place for a face-to-face meeting with the lead investigator. Prior to gathering data, each participant was given information about the procedures of the study and methods of data collection. Subsequently, they were asked to read and sign a consent form (Appendix C).

Data Gathering

In-depth interviewing is one of the main approaches used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Interviews vary on a continuum from structured (pre-established and inflexible questions) to unstructured formats (no prearranged questions that allow participants more control over the interview; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Semi-structured interviews allow interviewees to express themselves freely, which allows researchers to gather detailed information about the topic being studied (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Seidman (2013) sees interviews as a way of telling detailed stories, by allowing interviewees to reflect on their own experiences. Through reflection, individuals can express their most significant experiences without being limited to answer closed-ended questions, as would be the case when using a structured interview format. Therefore, six, individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the principal investigator. During and after the interviews, field notes were taken (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The field notes served as a secondary source of data, where non-verbal communication was detailed. For example, during the interviews the researchers took notes of the participants' reactions, posture, tone, and body language while responding to the questions. Interviews one through four took place in the middle of the season whereas interviews five and six took place after the season. All interviews took place in quiet locations, typically the coaches' offices.

Interview guide. An interview guide was created for this study and contained four sections (Appendix D). The first section included opening questions based on the evolution of the coaches' career, which helped to establish rapport with the participants and allowed the interviews to have a smooth transition to the key questions. Specifically, the key questions aimed to explore the coaches' knowledge and experiences on their organizational skills during the preparation for and at National Championship Tournaments (e.g., "When and how do you start preparing for a National Championship Tournament?"), and training for and during National Championship Tournaments (e.g., "Compare the training plan for your team during a season to the time when you find out you have qualified for the National Championship Tournament until you arrive to the venue"). Follow-up probes were used after the participants' responses to gain a better understanding on topics that required elaboration (e.g., "Can you give me an example of what you are talking about?", "What was that like?", "Can you tell me more about…?"). The third section included a summary question, which was meant to allow the coaches summarize the main points they believed were necessary to prepare for a National Championship Tournament. Finally, the fourth section aimed to clarify and/or add any comments that the interviewee had, and for the interviewer to answer any questions that the interviewee had with regards to the interview or the study.

Data Analysis

The interviews ranged from 50 to 100 minutes in length. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the participants' confidentiality. Additionally, information that could potentially identify the coaches as well as names of players and peers were altered to further ensure their confidentiality.

To analyze qualitative data, researchers can use deductive, inductive, or abductive approaches (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In the current study, data were analyzed using an inductive approach following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) guidelines for thematic analysis. More precisely, the data were analyzed in six phases: (a) *familiarization with the data*, (b) *coding*, (c) *searching for themes*, (d) *reviewing themes*, (e) *defining and naming themes*, and (f) *writing up.* Each phase will be described in the following section.

Familiarization with the data. The purpose of this phase was for the researcher to become familiar with the dataset content. Familiarization with the data was achieved by listening to the audio-recordings of the interviews multiple times. Also, the principal investigator transcribed all the interviews verbatim, making minor changes to correct grammatical errors and to delete the participants' names, years they won National Championship Tournaments, affiliations, and other potential identifying information to protect their confidentiality. The principal investigator read the interviews transcriptions numerous times to familiarize herself with each participant's interview.

Coding. The aim of this phase was to identify every aspect of the data related to the research questions. First, the investigator divided the data of each interview into data extracts. A data extract is a segment of text from the transcribed interviews that have potential information to answer the research questions. Each data extract was given a code. A code is "a word or brief phrase that captures the essence of why you think a particular bit of data may be useful" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 207). The codes were listed and organized in a Microsoft Word file.

Searching for themes. This phase involved identifying patterns in the coded data, which were labeled as themes. Braun and Clarke (2013) noted, "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned

response or meaning within the data set" (p. 224). This phase resulted in six initial themes: (a) *it has been a long journey,* (b) *planning is key for success,* (c) *excellence has no limits,* (d) *communication with athletes and support staff,* (e) *the psychology of coaching National Championship games*, and (f) *experience is overrated until you have it.* As you will see in the next subsection, modifications were made to these initial six themes.

Reviewing themes. The aim of this phase was to review whether the themes properly represented the codes and the data extracts. The principal investigator re-read the transcripts and coded data to make sure the themes were representative of the participants' perceptions. Some data extracts were modified based on discussions among the three researchers. First, the theme *it has been a long journey* was no longer included in the thematic analysis. Instead, the information contained in this theme will be described before the five themes (i.e., in the results section) to provide readers with background information about the coaches and their career progressions. Second, the theme *communication with athletes and support staff* was renamed as *communicating expectations to athletes and support staff*; and the theme *the psychology of coaching National Championship games* was renamed as *effective emotional management*.

Defining and naming themes. The aim of this phase was to define and identify the main message of each theme. There were five final themes: (a) *planning is key for success, (b) excellence has no limits, (c) communicating expectations to athletes and support staff, (d) effective emotional management*, and (e) *experience is overrated until you have it*. These themes were named using the participants' own words, expressions, or ideas, which was consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2013) guidelines. Each theme is defined below.

Planning is key for Success. Coaches said they developed detailed seasonal plans beginning the first day of training camp and concluding with the National Championship game.

Excellence has no Limits. The participants built a culture of excellence in their programs, which resulted from daily preparations and habits that are necessary for their teams to maintain a physical, technical, tactical, and mental edge on their opponents.

Communicating Expectations to Athletes and Support Staff. The coaches highlighted the importance of communicating and reinforcing individual roles to both their athletes and support staff as a way to create an optimal environment for team performance.

Effective Emotional Management. The coaches stressed the importance of managing both their own and their athletes' emotions with particular emphasis on the National Championship Tournament.

Experience is Overrated Until you Have It. Coaches highlighted the importance of personal experiences at National Championships, self-reflection, and more experienced mentors in order to continuously learn and improve as coaches and to help them prepare their teams for future competitions.

Trustworthiness

In quantitative studies, the quality of the study is judged by four main criteria: 1) *objectivity*, 2) *reliability*, 3) *generalizability*, and 4) *validity* (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). These same criteria cannot be applied in the same way to judge qualitative research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed a *parallel* criteria for judging qualitative research: 1) *confirmability*, 2) *dependability*, 3) *transferability*, and 4) *credibility*. The current study addressed two criteria to enhance the quality of the study: confirmability and credibility. Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the results. In other words, the findings of the study should reflect the participants' experiences and opinions rather than the researcher's point of view. Credibility refers to the consistency between the findings of the study and reality (Sparkes

& Smith, 2014). These two criteria allowed the researchers to ensure a proper interpretation and dissemination of the participants' experiences. A number of techniques have been suggested to achieve confirmability and credibility, for example: *triangulation*, *member check*, *audit trial*, *researcher reflexivity*, and *peer debriefing* (Shenton, 2004). Researcher reflexivity was used in the current study to achieve confirmability, and peer debriefing was used to achieve credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Researcher reflexivity. This strategy allows the researchers to seriously consider and report on personal beliefs and background that could shape the outcome of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It also allows the readers to understand the researcher's experiences and position and how these could influence the interpretation of the data (Kleinsasser, 2000). As a former competitive athlete and assistant coach, the principal investigator has experienced various occurrences during the preparation for different high-level competitions. Therefore, the topic of this study evolved from the principal investigator's experiences and interest on how coaches prepare their athletes for a major competition. Acknowledging this, the principal investigator followed the interview guide during each interview. Following the interview guide decreased the probability of leading the participants and allowed the researchers to collect data based on what the participants felt relevant and appropriate to share (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

A method that facilitated personal reflexivity was the use of *field notes*. As mentioned previously, the researchers in the current study wrote down notes during and after each interview with the purpose of having a record of nonverbal communications and of occurrences during the interviews that the researchers thought could have an influence on the data. The principal investigator used the field notes during the analysis of the data and while writing the results to help her have a proper interpretation of the results.

Peer debriefing. This strategy allowed the researcher to have "an external check of the research process" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Peer debriefing involves someone who is familiar with the research to provide support and challenge the researcher's assumptions and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the current study, this process involved asking a peer to review the coding process and provide feedback on the interpretation of the data while challenging the principal investigator so she could consider different points of view and interpret the results in a way that would best represent the participants' experiences.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter will present the results of the thematic analysis of the six interviews

conducted with the participants of the current study. The first section will provide a summary of

the nature of the data. Next, background information about the participants will be outlined.

Finally, the five themes that emerged from the thematic analysis, which included *planning is key*

for success, *excellence has no limits*, *communicating expectations to athletes and support staff*,

effective emotional management, and *experience is overrated until you have it* will be described.

Quotes from the coaches will be provided followed by a pseudonym to identify each coach.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the coaches' confidentiality.

Nature of the Data

A total of 374 data extracts resulted from the six interviews. Each data extract was given

a code based on the essence of the information, which resulted in 32 codes. The 32 codes were

grouped into five higher-order themes. Table 1 presents a list of the codes and themes with

respect to each coach. The number of data extracts from each interview varied from 47 (Dan) to

82 (Cathy and Phil). Due to the nature of in-depth interviews, participants had the freedom to

discuss a wide range of topics and to provide as many examples as they felt comfortable sharing,

which explains the variation in the number of extracts from one participant to another.

Table 1

Themes and Codes as Expressed by Each Participant

	Coaches						
Themes and Codes	Ivy	Cathy	Phil	Dan	Gabe	Mathew	Total
Planning is Key for Success							
• Nationals – Keeping routines	1	0	2	2	2	0	7
• Nationals – Game plan	7	7	7	5	1	2	29
• Season – Game plan	3	11	6	1	5	0	26
• Coaches' organizational skills	1	0	1	0	0	1	3
• Nationals – Academics	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
• Nationals – Logistics	4	4	3	2	4	4	21
Total	16	22	20	10	12	8	88
Excellence has no Limits							
• Art of coaching	0	2	1	1	2	0	6
• Coach's work ethic	0	0	0	4	1	0	5
• Fostering excellence	1	2	12	10	8	7	40
• Nationals – Physical preparation	1	3	1	0	0	0	5
• Season – Physical preparation	0	1	3	0	1	0	5
• Nationals – Practices	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
• Season – Practices	1	2	6	0	5	6	20
• Using video	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
Total	4	11	26	15	17	14	87

Table 1

Themes and Codes as Expressed by Each Participant

	Coaches						
Themes and Codes	Ivy	Cathy	Phil	Dan	Gabe	Mathew	Total
Communicating Expectations to Athletes and Support Staff							
• Team environment	5	0	0	3	0	1	9
• Nationals – Playing time	4	1	0	0	0	1	6
• Nationals – Communication	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
• Season – Communication	2	4	0	0	0	1	7
• Season – Athlete roles	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
• Nationals – Support staff	2	2	1	0	0	0	5
• Season – Support staff	0	0	2	0	1	1	4
Total	16	8	3	6	1	4	38
Effective Emotional Management							
• Nationals – Athlete emotions	5	0	3	1	2	1	12
• Season – Athlete emotions	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
• Nationals – Coaches' emotions	11	5	4	3	1	0	24
• Athlete motivation	2	0	0	1	0	3	6
• Athlete confidence	4	5	4	0	3	2	18
• Nationals – Mental preparation	0	4	0	1	2	0	7
Total	22	14	11	6	10	6	69

(Continued)

Table 1

Themes and Codes as Expressed by Each Participant

	Coaches						
Themes and Codes	Ivy	Cathy	Phil	Dan	Gabe	Mathew	Total
Experience is Overrated Until you Have It							
• Mentoring	3	8	2	0	1	0	14
• Coaches self-reflection	7	7	5	3	5	10	37
• Nationals – First time	5	5	4	4	3	2	23
• Nationals – Multiple	3	1	1	0	2	1	8
• Coaches' learning methods	0	1	3	0	3	3	10
Total	18	22	15	7	14	16	92
Totals	76	77	75	44	54	48	374

Participants' Background Information

The participants provided information about their athletic and coaching experiences up until and including their current positions. All six coaches participated in a number of different sports at a competitive level, however, none of them participated in a Canadian Interuniversity Sport National Championship Tournament as an athlete. Following their athletic careers, the coaches took different pathways that led to their current university positions. Four of the participants studied Physical Education in university and were always involved in teaching and coaching. Two participants started coaching because they had career-ending injuries as athletes. The participants had coached for an average of 13 years at their current positions and had combined to win more than 30 National titles.

Planning is Key for Success

This theme represents the coaches' ideology on developing seasonal plans that begins the first day of training camp and culminates with the National Championship game. Coaches talked about the importance of starting the season with a well-developed plan that includes every aspect of training. For example, having days scheduled for physical conditioning, tactical and technical skill development, skill assessments, team building activities, and individual and team meetings. Additionally, the coaches talked about planning aspects once they qualified for the Championship Tournament. The coaches highlighted that every part of their daily preparations during the season helped prepare them for the National Championship Tournament:

> Every day is preparation for Nationals. We start from day one, from postseason, from preseason, every detail I demand starts from day one. Before the season starts and throughout the season I try to follow the top teams in the league. I watch the tapes of different teams so I have a little bit of knowledge of all the teams. I try to simulate in practice the pressure of what the athletes will have to face in a game. I simulate that through putting pressure through time, through goals, through mental and emotional pressure (Cathy).

> We start preparing for the National Championship very early. We have a saying: you build your sled in the summer. In other words, you are getting ready for winter by building your sled in the summer, as opposed to building it during the winter. We prepare them [players] technically and tactically starting at the end of August. I have a very detailed schedule, I write down and I include every system we use. There are hours and hours of preparation. If I do this just before the Championship it's going to be too late. I want to build that from day one (Phil).

To help with their seasonal preparations, some of the coaches simulated National Championship competitions during various points of the season to help the athletes prepare for the event:

> You play four games in four days at the Nationals and that is tough both mentally and physically. We prepare for that weekend throughout the season by mimicking the National weekend two or three weekends before we head to the tournament (Mathew). During the season we have practices at different times because during the tournament practice time varies between eight o'clock and five o'clock. So, we prepare for something like that (Gabe).

Additionally, the coaches talked about the importance of maintaining routines throughout the entire season that would carry over to the National Championship Tournament:

> I think the biggest mistake a coach can make when you get to a National Championship game is to change your routine. For example, if the coach shows ten video clips before every game all year long and then, all of a sudden, before the championship game you are showing them 30 video clips or doing things differently, then you are making a big mistake. You need to keep the same routine and have confidence in it. I remind the support staff to be themselves before we leave for Nationals, I tell them, 'Be yourself. If you haven't done something up until now, then don't start doing it now. Do what you have been doing. That is why we have gotten to where we are' (Phil).
>
> We want to prepare the same way for a preseason game as we do for a regular season game as we do for a National Championship. So, in the eyes of the players we don't want to change too much (Gabe).

In particular, coaches talked about the logistics behind preparing for a National Championship Tournament once they know they have qualified. According to the coaches, all

logistics are taken care of before leaving to the Championship Tournament venue. The coaches

all met with their support staff before leaving to the Tournament:

> The moment I find out we have qualified to the Championship Tournament there are a lot
>
> of administrative stuff I have to take care of. We need to prepare every detail, hotel, plane
>
> ticket, bus, meals, everything. Right away I sit down with my staff and we basically try to
>
> have a picture of what the week will be like: when we depart, what is the best timeframe
>
> to be there. Every detail needs to be prepared so the coaches can concentrate on the game
>
> plans and practices when we get there (Ivy).

> Everybody has a copy of a schedule I make with my manager. We have relaxed time,
>
> study time, team time, video time, dinner time. The managers order food. Players do not
>
> have to worry about anything. They do not have to make many decisions. I think that the
>
> less decisions players have to make the better it is. So they follow a schedule. They rest
>
> their brain (Cathy).

Two coaches talked specifically about including academics in their plans to help the athletes be

more focused during the Tournament:

> The big thing [arranging for Nationals] is school, because you are going to be missing a
>
> week of school. You can't show up on Sunday and tell the professor: 'I am leaving
>
> Tuesday.' The professors are willing to help you if you let them know ahead of time.
>
> That is a lot of pressure off the students right away, knowing that school is not going to
>
> be a problem and that all they have to do is play (Mathew).

Excellence has no Limits

This theme describes how coaches have built a culture of excellence in their programs. More specifically, the coaches talked about the daily preparations that are necessary during the season for their teams to maintain a physical, technical, and tactical edge in competition, which they also felt helped them become perennial championship contenders in their sports.

All six of the participants described how they created environments that led to a commitment of excellence:

We have a pretty good culture about winning. We have won plenty of times and the players talk about being *that* team. I hear the senior players talking to the rookies, they say, 'I am not going to be on the first team to lose the [name of conference] championship and I am not going to let you guys bring us down.' So when these young players get to their fourth year they are going to be saying the same thing to the new ones. They put pressure on each other to succeed (Mathew).

As a coach, I have won many Nationals, but I am still hungry to win more. Every member who has been here has won a National Championship. The players have the opportunity to leave their legacy here. I ask them, 'What are you going to leave in this program? What legacy are you leaving as a player?' This program is not for everyone - you need courage and confidence to play here (Gabe).

My main goal is to make this program better every year. Yes, we are pretty good, we are one of the best teams in the country, but there are so many things we can work on and improve. So, we are always aiming for excellence and there is no limit for that (Ivy).

You have to build the culture of determination and toughness from day one. The culture

has to come from within the team. The players have to push each other. We try to get

better every day and be as good as we can be (Dan).

It all boils down to creating championship habits over the course of the whole season.

With the coaching staff we talk about developing everyday habits for performance,

success, and excellence. Everything that we do is to make us better for when we get to

the end of the season. We try and approach every game and every practice like it is a

play-off game (Phil).

Most of the coaches discussed that the way they prepared their teams during seasonal

practices helped their teams to perform successfully at National Championship Tournaments:

During practices I will become incredibly tough on the players. When their emotions and

mental states are in an uncomfortable zone, where they feel they are going to crack, I

look at them and say, 'Don't you crack, because [Nationals] is going to be a lot harder

than this. Remember: I am getting you into that emotional state so that you can learn to

perform through it' (Cathy).

You want to prepare your whole season for the National Tournament. Our philosophy is

to be the 'best', which is an acronym for better every single time. So every practice

should be the best of the year. I don't talk about winning the National Championship - I

talk about being the most improved team (Gabe).

Winning a National Championship is everything to most of the players on our team. Hard

work during practices is how we accomplish it. If a player is not going to work hard

during practice then I would ask him, 'Why are you here if you are not going to work

hard? In this team you are training and playing with people who want to work extremely

hard and want to win a National Championship.' Every player who comes to this team

knows we are going to train hard (Dan).

Once the game starts the captains are all in charge. You can yell from the sidelines but

they are really in charge. My last practice of every week is a captain's practice. It can be

five minutes or two hours – it is up to them. But I want the players to start listening to the

captains' voices (Mathew).

Although the coaches said that the physical, technical, and tactical routines and preparations

were kept the same throughout the regular season they highlighted that practices were shorter in

duration leading up to and during the National Championship Tournament, which helped the

players achieve peak performance:

During the season we go hard, we replicate what we will be doing in games. Once we

have qualified for the National Championship Tournament our practices are shorter but

they are intense. If we get injured, then we get injured. We are not going to go soft. But

during the days leading up to the tournament, instead of training for one and a half hours,

we might train for 40 minutes. We really reduce the time (Cathy).

During the National Championship Tournament you probably want to back off a little bit

in terms of the workload and the intensity. You can't suddenly stop training because the

detraining takes a period of time and you want them to be at their absolute peak for the

gold medal game. You don't want them to be too tired because they have trained too

much and you don't want them to be too tired because they haven't trained enough. So,

you want to keep the same intensity but reduce the volume (Phil).

Communicating Expectations to Athletes and Support Staff

The coaches described the importance of communicating expectations and roles to athletes and support staff throughout the season, especially during the days leading up to the National Championship Tournament, which they felt was a key strategy to avoid distractions and keep the team focused throughout the tournament. In this theme, the term support staff refers to all members of the team outside of the head coach and athletes, such as assistant coaches, video coaches, strength and conditioning coaches, sport psychology practitioners, etc.

The coaches all felt that communicating with their athletes and support staff on a regular basis throughout the season helped prepare them for their roles at the Championship Tournament:

I make sure that they [players] know what they have to do. There aren't too many questions at Nationals because I think we do a pretty good job of telling the players what we expect from them throughout the season. Communication is major! It is all about how you communicate your vision, the activities, and their roles (Ivy).

We work together with our strength and conditioning coaches. They are the ones who will make sure the players are training the way I want them to. I make sure that everyone on the support staff is on the same page (Phil).

In addition to outlining expectations and roles during the regular season, the participants also described their communications with athletes and support staff prior to leaving for the National Championship Tournament. For example, the coaches described how they speak to their athletes about expectations and roles before Nationals:

Before we leave, I always prepare the team by explaining what is ahead of them. There are players who have been there [at the National Championship Tournament] before but

you have players who are in their first year and are really nervous about it. So, I always

try to explain what is going to happen: there is a banquet, opening ceremonies, and the

format of the championship. So, when we get there they know exactly what to expect

(Ivy).

Coaches describe the National Championship Tournament as being in a boat going

through a storm. Coaches will normally describe the "storm" to the players. But they

should be telling players *how* to get through it! The girls know what we need to do by the

time we get to Nationals. They know when they are going into the game. They know

when I am going to call them when they are on the bench (Cathy).

Some of the coaches asked the senior players to talk with the first-year players to share their

experiences of playing at a National Championship:

Experience is such a huge part [of preparing for Nationals]. Experience even amongst the

players. I get the older players to talk with the new ones and that helps them know what

to expect (Phil).

In the days leading up to the tournament, the coaches believed it was fundamental to

reiterate their expectations to the support staff. Although the coaches highlighted the importance

of maintaining routines, they also believed it was critical to talk with the support staff about

specific adaptations for the National Championship context:

Everybody has to know exactly what he or she is doing. For example, I tell the support

staff where they should be in between periods, who is expected to be in the dressing

room, and at what time. I plan this beforehand because I don't want to have to coach the

players *and* my support staff at the same time (Ivy).

During our first National Championship, my [support staff] started to give directions to the athletes on the floor, and directions to me. We were all giving different directions and everything was so disorganized. We made the girls nervous and we lost that game because we mishandled the communication on the floor. Now I know I must have a healthy support staff and I make sure to tell them that I am the only person who speaks on the floor. I also tell them to remain calm during Nationals (Cathy).

Effective Emotional Management

This theme presents coaches' perceptions on how they managed their athletes' emotions – as well as their own – at National Championship Tournaments. Participants shared the strategies they used to manage emotions effectively during National Championship Tournaments.

The participants noted that playing at National Championship Tournaments is emotionally demanding for both players and coaches:

There is more stress involved during the National Championship Tournament. There is more stress because we all want the medal. We are all nervous. Playing at Nationals is different. I know people in the media will say, 'Oh it's just another game.' The Nationals are times 12 – it's the same game but the emotions are not the same (Ivy).

Although the National Championship Tournament can be a stressful event, the coaches mentioned that it is an exciting moment as well:

I can see it in the players' eyes. It [National Championship Tournament] is different because the season is almost over. We have been waiting for *the* moment, we are finally there, so it is exciting and everybody wants to play. It is emotional. Nationals are more fun [than regular season games]. (Ivy).

Some players on this team have won three National Championships in their careers. You want that excitement. We have won so many times but as a coach you still want it to be exciting for all the players. It is an exciting journey. It is still important for the coach to have that emotion and to acknowledge it (Gabe).

Because participating at the National Championship Tournament involves a range of emotions, the coaches believed it was important to implement activities that specifically addressed athletes' confidence and motivation leading up to games:

My team has a PWA, which means: positive winning attitude. We have activities to encourage PWA before play-offs and before Nationals. These activities include things like doing a community skate and reading e-mails from our alumni. Also, we try to have different themes every year. For example, one year we had a theme of three. We had threes all over the place and we talked about why this theme is important: three games to win a National Championship; it will be our third National Championship. We had six days to train, so there were two sets of practices in three days, and we had three drills in each set. We have all these activities to build the confidence of our group. It is the biggest thing for players (Gabe).

The Friday night at Nationals our alumni host a supper for us. After dinner, the rookies do a skit where they get to make fun of the senior players. This has been going on for 10 or so years. It is a tradition. It's hard to keep them motivated when they're in a hotel for four or five days. So we do these types of activities (Mathew).

Last championship we showed a video to the players and it really motivated them. The video was associated with our game plan. It was really short but we showed them and told them, 'Okay, this is what the other team does, and these are the tools we have to

confront that. This is what they do, this is what we have.' Watching the video helped

them realize that the other team had some strengths, but that we had strengths too (Ivy).

Additionally, the coaches shared some examples of how they have managed athletes' emotions

during games at the National Championship Tournament:

Certainly at the beginning of the game [at Nationals] if you can get them to focus on

simple things to start the game, not worrying about things like scoring goals or getting

shots on net, but get them focused on keeping their feet moving, having a short shift, and

communicating well. Regardless of the circumstance, regardless of their ability level,

those are things they can do. So, if they have success on those simple things at the

beginning of the game then that success will build and grow as the game goes along. So,

that's one way of helping them to deal with what could be perceived as a stressful

situation (Phil).

At Nationals, I can see the players are nervous and anxious, but at the same time they are

excited. So I try to use their emotions in a positive way. For example, I laugh during

regular season games if there is something to laugh about. That's the way I am. So, at

Nationals, I am not going to suddenly be serious behind the bench. Even if we are losing

in the National final, and if I feel like making a joke, I will make it. The players are used

to that and I think that's what makes them feel less anxious (Ivy).

In addition to managing the athletes' emotions, the coaches thought it was necessary for

them to manage their own emotions as well. Some of the coaches talked about how they

mismanaged their emotions while coaching at their first National Championship Tournament.

For example, Ivy noted, "The first time we participated in the National Championship I was

nervous and scared. I did not do a very good job handling my own behaviours and it affected the outcome of the game." Additionally, Cathy noted:

> During our first championship I was emotional and stressed. I started to yell at the girls. I tried to light a fire under the players. I was aggressive – a dictator, and very controlling. I thought all those behaviors were important in the National Championship. But at a National Championship you cannot have those types of behaviours. I believe we lost because I was so emotional (Cathy).

Based on these experiences, the participants shared the strategies they used to manage their own emotions leading up to and throughout the National Championship Tournament:

> In our second championship I was physically exhausted. I had shingles. I was itchy everywhere. Now I walk my dog, listen to music, read, pray, and meditate. These are important things I do to keep me sane during that time [Nationals] (Cathy).

> There are other types of stresses [at Nationals]. Everybody expects you to win, which is stressful in and of itself. I have learned it is important to cut off as much "noise" as possible at Nationals. For example, I do not like to be around the media. So, I have learned how to deal with the media intelligently and how to deal with the unnecessary high behind those types of situations. I stay out of their way as much as I can. I do not get caught up in what is going on around me. I do not like being around anybody else except for my players [during Nationals]. The more you go to Nationals, the more you understand how to stay focused on the things you need to be focused on, which is your group (Dan).

Some of the coaches described specific examples of how they controlled their own emotional states during games at National Championship Tournaments, which they felt

positively influenced their teams' performances. For example, Phil and Ivy described the importance of their own body language during games:

> They [players] are going to be nervous [at Nationals]. So, as a coach, I have to know how to manage that. Even if I am very nervous internally during the National Championship, I am very conscious that the players don't see that. I want them to see that I am relaxed but focused. The same way I would want to have them to be relaxed and focused (Phil).

> I think having positive body language helps me. Your body talks to your mind. If I look confident, happy, and I behave as usual behind the bench even when I am nervous, then I think it helps me feel good and I transmit that to my players (Ivy).

Additionally, Cathy expressed the importance of maintaining a positive attitude during games:

> We have to control our emotions as coaches. To control my emotions I have become a pretty good actress. It is like theatre. I feel like a maestro of a big play. [Playing at Nationals] is like the grand opening in Broadway – are you going to freak out because it is Broadway? Are you going to freak out because there are all these people watching you? No, because you have rehearsed the play a thousand times – you have the same lines and it's the same actors. I tell myself, 'This is *my* show, look what we have created!' The first couple of times I coached at Nationals I was aggressive, I used to yell and go all over the place during games. Now, I enjoy the moment, I laugh, and I have fun. My job is to keep the players relaxed, but to do this I have to be relaxed, too (Cathy).

Experience is Overrated Until you Have it

This theme describes how the coaches acquired their knowledge that helped them succeed in their careers. More specifically, the participants believed that engaging in self-reflection on past experiences at National Championship Tournaments, reading books, attending

conferences and interacting with other coaches, and having a more experienced mentor were all sources that helped them modify their coaching behaviours, improve their coaching skills, and enrich their knowledge to prepare their teams for a National Championship Tournament.

Most of the coaches were dissatisfied with their first experience coaching at a National Championship Tournament. As a result, they reflected and shared some of the lessons they learned from this experience that they thought helped their teams perform better at subsequent National Championship Tournaments:

The first time we went to Nationals I was an inexperienced and young coach. I did not have an experienced staff. It was new for everybody. We lost that championship and I knew it was my fault. After that first time coaching at Nationals I went back and wrote notes for myself – what *not* to do to win a National Championship: panicking, feeling angry, trying to control all [player and support staff] behaviours – you cannot do these things (Cathy).

Our team was not particularly experienced the first time we went to the National Championship. I was going into it [Nationals] by the seat of my pants and we lost in the final game. This first experience was an eye opener. I thought I knew it all back then. Now I realize that I did not know it all. Experience is overrated, until you have it (Phil).

The first time I went to Nationals I didn't do my homework. I should have phoned people and asked about the teams that we were going to play. After that first year I knew what I had to do. For me it was an eye opener (Mathew).

In addition to the lessons learned from their first experience coaching at the National Championship Tournament, the coaches spent considerable time reflecting on each trip to the

tournament and how they could improve their coaching skills. This involved a combination of reading books, attending conferences, and interacting with other coaches:

> After the first time coaching at a National Championship Tournament, I started to read books on leadership and successful entrepreneurs. I realized how far away I was from them. I thought, 'Can I learn to be like them?' It was a very challenging time for me because the more I read and received feedback [from other coaches], the more I knew how far away I was from becoming a successful coach (Cathy).

> I go to a lot of conferences. The good thing about coaching conferences is that you meet a lot of people. You have to ask questions. A lot of people do not ask because they are afraid. But I tell them, 'Ask the question!' I am a fanatic of getting better. I have learned by reading books and by talking with other coaches (Phil).

> I take notes at each championship. I take notes of things that happened during the tournament so I can go back to them once the tournament is over. I have learned to use the lessons I learned from every National Championship. You may have won but sometimes there are still some things that could have been better. Taking notes before and after each tournament is useful. For example, 'Ok, we lost, is there a reason? Did I do everything I could do as a coach to make sure our group got the best out of it?' I have also learned by talking to other coaches and reading books. You can learn a lot from a book. Motivational books or business and leadership books are very helpful. I also use Twitter now. There is so much information there. So, during the summer I take time to make a file with ideas from all these resources to use them during the year. It is a combination of a lot of little things in your ultimate preparation (Gabe).

At the end of each season we have a meeting with the support staff. We look back to what we did during the Championship Tournament and we put that on paper. We have been doing this for five years, and we have solved a lot of problems. Before the next season starts, I look back at this written document and remind myself of the things we need to do in the new season (Ivy).

Additionally, most of the coaches mentioned the value and importance of acquiring a more experienced mentor. For example, Gabe noted, "My mentor helped me in so many ways: recruiting, having respect for other coaches, and to be hungry to win more championships." More specifically, the participants thought that the most valuable experience of having a mentor was that they learned how to manage themselves, which they felt influenced their performance as coaches:

I have a mentor. She has shown me that she really trusts me and that she is proud of what I do. She has mainly helped me to improve myself. Her mentoring has nothing to do with [name of sport]. She has never given me any advice on the game. She makes me feel that what I do is okay. She is always there to answer my questions and to show me she is happy with what I do. I think that really helped me to start coaching at such a young age. With the [limited] experience I had the first time we went to the National Championship Tournament, I was feeling pretty confident because of my mentor (Ivy).

After my first time coaching at Nationals I knew I needed a mentor. I was the limiting factor to my team's success. I thought I had a team that could win a National Championship but I did not know what to do. I had no experience. I could not get it done. So, I asked for a mentor – someone to teach me a way. When I met my mentor it was awesome. It has been an amazing mentor-mentee relationship. He helped me transform

myself. He taught me how to manage myself – the emotional side of the game, how to

coach women, and how to deal with my emotions (Cathy).

Summary of Results

Six of the most successful Canadian university team sport coaches were individually

interviewed to investigate how they prepared themselves and their teams for success at the

National Championship Tournament. At the time of the interviews, the participants had been to

at least four National Championship Tournaments and had combined to win more than 30

National titles. Meticulous planning, fostering a culture of excellence, effective communication,

emotional management skills, as well as self-reflection were all key reoccurring factors with this

sample of successful coaches. In their programs, the coaches demanded a great level of

commitment to excellence, which was the foundation of their culture. This culture was nurtured

every year through regular communication with athletes and support staff. The coaches' goal was

to maintain high standards of excellence in their programs every year, thus training for the

National Championship involved a yearlong preparation for both athletes and coaches. Once the

championship began, the teams had a clear understanding of their expectations and roles, and

engaged in activities to control the emotional aspect of the tournament. It was through self-

reflection that the coaches modified their coaching skills and behaviours, and learned strategies

to enhance the teams' performance. In sum, it was the combination of these factors that allowed

them to improve as coaches and to continuously develop successful teams as evidenced by

repeated trips, and victories, at the National Championship Tournament.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate highly successful Canadian university coaches' perceptions on how they prepared themselves and their teams for success at National Championship Tournaments. Six of the most accomplished university coaches in Canada shared their knowledge and behaviours on how they developed and maintained a culture of excellence.

Planning is Key for Success

The coaches believed that thorough seasonal planning was critical for developing their athletes and teams to perform optimally at the National Championship Tournament on an annual basis. The coaches' plans began the first day of training camp and lasted until the National Championship game. Previous research on expert North American coaches has demonstrated they were meticulous planners, which is an important component of coaching effectiveness (Bloom, 2002; Côté & Salmela, 1996; Côté & Sedgwick, 2003; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). However, little attention has focused on the importance of planning for National Championship competitions. For example, Yukelson and Rose (2014) stated that having a detailed seasonal game plan enabled a university volleyball team to win multiple championships in a row. However, the article did not specify preparations for competition at the National Championship Tournament. While the coaches in the current study also talked about having a detailed seasonal plan, the purpose of the study also allowed the participants to elaborate on how some of their daily practices were specifically designed to prepare their teams for the National Championship Tournament. For example, one of the coaches said he scheduled four practices in four days to expose his athletes to the same psychological and physical demands that occurred over the course of a National Championship weekend. Additionally, since the National Championship

Tournament involves playing games at all times of the day (morning, afternoon, or night), some

of the coaches purposefully scheduled different practice hours during the season. Having these

elements in their regular season practices helped athletes develop championship routines. This is

consistent with previous research on the importance of developing routines, which has

demonstrated that routines were a critical part of planning (Feldman & Pentland, 2003) and

positively influenced athletes' performance (e.g., Gould & Maynard, 2009; Orlick & Partington,

1988). Similarly, research has shown that coaches have game-day routines for themselves and

their teams for regular season contests, which includes team meetings, game plan rehearsal, and

engagement in physical activity to help reduce stress (e.g., Bloom, Durand-Bush, & Salmela,

1997). In line with this research, the participants in the current study noted that they purposefully

kept the same technical, tactical, and physical preparations throughout the regular season and

after qualifying for the National Championship Tournament. The participants believed that

developing routines for themselves and for their athletes that began during the regular season and

continued at the National Championship Tournament was a critical element of their overall

success. Thus, the current findings extend our understanding of the organization component of

the coaching model (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995) by demonstrating how

meticulous seasonal planning positively impacts a team's performance at the National

Championship Tournament.

Part of the coaches' seasonal plans included managing the administrative responsibilities

for their support staff in advance of the National Championship Tournament. Previous research

has postulated that coaches considered themselves as managers of their programs and the leaders

of the athletes and support staff (Abraham, Collins, & Martindale, 2006), which led to increased

amounts of stress prior to major competitions (Kelley, 1994). Similarly, athletes' psychological

stress is also higher before competitions (Haneishi et al., 2007). Olusoga, Maynard, Hays, and

Butt (2011) studied Olympic coaches' perceptions of the factors that helped them coach "in a

stressful Olympic environment" (p. 229). Among their findings, the coaches needed to rest and

conserve their energy before the Olympics. Along the same line, the current participants also said

that coaching at a National Championship demanded a lot of energy. Consequently, they tried to

address many administrative responsibilities before leaving for the tournament venue as a way to

reduce their personal stress and enhance their focus during the championship. For example, some

of the coaches prepared a schedule for both their athletes and support staff that specified the time

and place of every activity they had to attend. These results suggest that university coaches

experience an increased amount of stress prior to a National Championship and that they

developed strategies to help manage both their stress, as well as stress for their athletes and

support staff.

Most of the coaches included the athletes' academic requirements as part of the

administrative responsibilities that they planned for prior to the National Championship

Tournament. Previous research on coaching university athletes has postulated that a particular

challenge of coaching this group was managing athletes' academic duties (Macquet, 2010). The

current results revealed that coaches scheduled study times during the tournament so that the

athletes could work on their assignments or study for exams. These findings suggest that coaches

were concerned about the growth and development of athletes on and off the field, which is

consistent with a holistic approach to coaching (Duchesne, Bloom, & Sabiston, 2011; Preston,

2013; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Because university athletes have academic responsibilities in

addition to their athletic careers, a holistic approach to coaching seems to be critical when

planning for the National Championship. Even though the teams were preparing for the most

important tournament of the year, the coaches were still concerned about the athletes' academic performance. This suggests that the coaches valued the athlete as a person even during stressful situations. Future research could investigate university athletes' perspectives on dealing with academics while preparing for major competitions and the ways coaches can facilitate this process.

Excellence has no Limits

The current coaches stressed the importance of building and maintaining a culture of excellence in their programs both on and off the playing field. This is partly accomplished by strong planning and organizational skills, which is also a part of the vision of the coach. Coaching research has shown that successful coaches have a clear vision of what they want to accomplish (Vallée & Bloom, 2005) and how they can turn their vision into actions that allow them to reach their goals (Desjardins, 1996; Schroeder, 2010). In the current study, the coaches' vision was to maintain a high standard of excellence in their programs every year, something which took years to refine and develop.

The current coaches have all reached a point in their careers where they were able to clearly articulate both their vision of excellence and the ways in which they achieve it. In a study of the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team, Hodge, Henry, and Smith (2014) found that one of the factors that allowed them to have an extraordinary winning record was the coaches' and the players' expectations of excellence on a daily basis. The authors suggested that the All Blacks' legacy, history, and personal meaning were a key underlying factor of the team's expectation and achievement of excellence. Similarly, Schroeder (2010) revealed that the most important factor for culture change was establishing behavioural values, such as hard work, discipline, and effort. Although these studies have provided important insights into this topic, there is still a lot to learn

about the factors involved in developing a successful culture in high performance sport teams (Cruickshank, Collins, & Minten, 2013) and there is limited research on how coaches maintain a successful culture over time (Gilbert, 2015). The current findings suggest that the vision of the coach, which was molded and refined each season, was the foundation of developing and maintaining a culture of excellence. Future studies could investigate how coaches' vision changes over time and how this influences a team's culture.

In the current study, part of demanding excellence involved creating an environment where every practice was designed to be as challenging as a National Championship game. Similarly, Yukelson and Rose (2014) stated that championships were built in practice and highlighted that "in order to be good, you have to train like a champion" (p. 56). In a similar manner, Hodge and colleagues (2014) found that the All Blacks' goal was to be the "best in the world every day" (p. 68) and this was the underlying motivator of each practice. According to the vision, support, and challenge model proposed by Arthur, Hardy, and Woodman (2012), the coaches' behaviours and expectations inspire athletes and mold the athletes' vision, which is a determinant of how hard they will work and train. In the current study all of the coaches acknowledged that playing for their teams was tough because they challenged the players in every practice. For example, one of the coaches said that every practice should be the best of the year. This finding appears to be in line with the *inspirational motivation* segment of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). Transformational leaders inspire and energize their followers to work together towards a common goal (Bass, 1990). There are four characteristics of transformational leadership: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1999). The findings of the current study are in line with the inspirational motivation characteristic of a transformational leader, which is

defined as the leader's ability to envision the future, sell the vision to the group, communicate high expectations, and consequently, gain commitment from the followers to work towards accomplishing the vision of their leader (Bass, 1999). The current findings suggest that coaches should be aware of the impact of their vision on the players' commitment and motivation to train, especially in an environment demanding high levels of excellence. It seems that challenging athletes and reminding them of the teams' vision on a regular basis are the building blocks of developing a culture of sustained excellence.

Communicating Expectations to Athletes and Support Staff

The participants felt that communicating expectations and roles to the athletes throughout the season, especially during the days leading up to the National Championship, helped the players focus and avoid distractions during the tournament. Previous research has postulated that athletes in team sports normally took on different roles (Eys, Schinke, & Jeffrey, 2007) and this can have negative consequences if athletes were not clear about their expectations (Eys & Carron, 2001). For example, athletes experiencing role ambiguity showed greater anxiety (Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, & Carron, 2003), which also undermines team performance (Benson, Eys, Surya, Dawson, & Schneider, 2013). Eys, Carron, Bray, and Beauchamp (2003) found that athletes' perceptions of role ambiguity decreased from the beginning of a season to the end of the season. However, Bray (1998) found no significant change of role ambiguity over time. Although there is a great amount of research on role ambiguity, the majority of studies seem to be from the athletes' perspective and quantitative in nature. The findings of the current study extend this body of literature by demonstrating the coaches' perspective on the importance of role clarification throughout the whole season. In particular, the coaches mentioned that they meet with their athletes during the days leading up to the tournament to reiterate and clarify their

roles and expectations for Nationals. For example, some of the coaches mentioned that every year they had players attending the National Championship for the first time, therefore, the coaches made sure to explain the format of the championship to them (e.g., opening ceremonies, banquet) to help them stay focused and avoid distractions. Other coaches asked the senior athletes to share their experiences from previous National Championships with the first-year athletes. These strategies are important since studies have shown that athletes perceive coaches and teammates to be the most influential factor contributing to how well they understand their roles (Eys, Carron, Beauchamp, & Bray, 2005). Clearly, it is imperative that coaches devote time to communicate with their athletes. In fact, in the realm of communication in coaching research it has been demonstrated that the ability to communicate effectively was an essential skill of successful coaching (Wang & Ramsey, 1997). Although Eys and colleagues (2003) found that athletes' perception of role ambiguity decreased over time, the findings of the current study suggested that role clarification was critical throughout the entire season, including the final stage of competitions.

In addition to communicating roles and expectations to their athletes, coaches felt it was fundamental to reiterate their expectations to the support staff during the days leading up to the tournament. The coaches believed it was critical to talk with the support staff about specific adaptations for the National Championship context. As mentioned in the results section, in the current study the term support staff refers to all members of the team outside of the head coach and athletes, such as assistant coaches, video coaches, strength and conditioning coaches, sport psychology practitioners, etc. In the coaching literature, research has revealed the numerous roles and responsibilities of assistant coaches (e.g., Carter & Bloom, 2009; Côté & Salmela, 1996; Rathwell, Bloom, & Loughead, 2014). However, research on assistant coaches is still

underdeveloped and there is limited research on how the support staff influences athletes'

performance. To date, most studies have focused on coaching staff cohesion and its impact on

the team. For example, Zakrajsek, Abildso, Hurst, and Watson (2007) investigated the

relationship between coaches' and athletes' perceptions of coaching staff cohesion, team

cohesion, and performance. They found that athletes' and coaches' perceptions of coaching staff

cohesion were positively related to team cohesion and suggested that coaching staff cohesion had

an indirect relationship with performance. Zakrajsek and colleagues explained that the coaching

staff was a team within a team, therefore they should work together under the same vision of the

head coach. Furthermore, they proposed that athletes tended to model the behaviours of the

coaching staff (Zakrajsek, Abildso, Hurst, & Watson, 2007). Consequently, coaching staff

cohesion can be a factor influencing team cohesion and performance (Bandura, 1977; Martin,

2002; Zakrajsek et al., 2007). The findings of the current study suggest that clarifying the roles

and expectations of the support staff for the tournament can positively influence athletes'

performance. For example, one of the participants pointed out that the first time they went to the

National Championship the players underperformed and lost the final game due to

disorganization of the support staff. Consequently, most of the participants felt that articulating

the expected behaviours and duties to their support staff prior to leaving for the National

Championship Tournament was a contributing factor to team success. From the head coaches'

perspective it appears that the behaviours of the support staff have an influence on the players'

performance. The current findings suggest that successful coaches strengthen their support staff

cohesion prior to major competitions.

Effective Emotional Management

The participants in the current study emphasized the importance of managing the athletes' emotions during a National Championship Tournament. Previous research on elements associated with Olympic performance has revealed that athletes' emotional control played a key role in their success (e.g., Gould & Maynard, 2009; Mahoney & Avener, 1977; Robazza & Bortoli, 1998; Taylor, Gould, & Rolo, 2008). Although there is a broad body of research on how emotions influence athletes' performance, less attention has been given to the coaches' perception on athletes' emotions during competition. In the current study, most of the coaches said that participating in a National Championship Tournament was emotionally demanding for the athletes. The participants described this moment as stressful but also an exciting and fun experience for the players. Thus, the coaches believed it was important to help the athletes control the wide range of emotions they experienced during the tournament. The findings of the current study appear to be in line with the definition of *emotional intelligence*, which is the ability to manage emotions by appropriately identifying emotions and using this information to guide one's behaviours (Goleman, 1998; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Research on emotional intelligence outside of the sport context has demonstrated a link between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction, greater capacity to cope with occupational stress (Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2004), increased ability to deal with conflicts (Jordan & Troth, 2002), improved work performance (Slaski & Cartwright, 2003), and more effective and successful leadership (George, 2000).

While there is a lot of research in emotional intelligence in domains such as business, education, and health, it is still underdeveloped in the sport and coaching context, except for a few examples (e.g., Meyer & Fletcher, 2007; Thelwell, Lane, Weston, & Greenlees, 2008).

Thelwell and colleagues (2008) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and coaching efficacy. In this quantitative study, 99 coaches filled out the Emotional Intelligence Scale and the Coaching Efficacy Scale (CES). Regression analyses revealed that the majority of the subscales of emotional intelligence correlated significantly with the overall CES. In particular, there was a significant correlation between CES subscales and the coaches' ability to appraise the emotions of others. Therefore, they suggested that for coaches to have high game strategy efficacy (e.g., how confident are you in your ability to make critical decisions during competition), they needed to understand how their athletes reacted to the competitive environment and its emotional climate. In a similar manner, Chan and Mallett (2011) wrote a comprehensive discussion on the importance of emotional intelligence for high-performance coaching. The aim of their paper was to provide examples of how emotional intelligence enhanced coaches' ability to manage and lead their athletes and support staff. More specifically, they stated that emotional intelligence contributed to leadership quality. For example, emotional information, such as athletes' pre-competition anxiety, can guide the coach to respond adequately by adapting their leadership style to the situation. They concluded that the inability to perceive and manage emotions may be detrimental for interpersonal processes and negatively influence performance. Although this paper highlighted the importance of using emotional information to guide behaviours, it did not provide concrete examples of how coaches can help players manage their emotions before a major competition. In the current study, the participants were aware of the emotional climate of a National Championship, therefore, they had specific activities planned to manage the players' emotions. For example, some of the coaches made the athletes focus on their individual and team strengths and on drills that the athletes dominated and felt comfortable executing. These activities mainly focused on the athletes' confidence, which

seems to be essential since research has continuously shown that there is a direct correlation between emotions, confidence, and success (e.g., Jones & Taylor, 2005; Zinsser, Bunker, & Williams, 2010). Because the purpose of the current study allowed the participants to share their experiences from the first time they coached at a National Championship up to and including their last National Championship, the results showed that the way they dealt with athletes' emotions changed over time. These findings suggest that being aware of athletes' emotions and reacting effectively to them, two characteristics of emotional intelligence, are skills that can be acquired and developed through experience. Thus, future research should aim to establish interventions to provide coaches with strategies to develop these skills and allow them to learn about the importance of emotional intelligence for improving coaching behaviours.

In addition to managing the athletes' emotions, the coaches felt it was also fundamental to be in control of their own emotions. Research in coaching psychology has identified numerous factors that enabled coaches to enhance their athletes' performance (e.g., Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Mallett, 2005) and the characteristics that made an effective coach (e.g., Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Thelwell et al., 2008). However, less is known about coaches as performers themselves (Thelwell et al., 2008), which is surprising since coaches are constantly dealing with team conflicts, athletes' personal issues, athletes' emotions, planning practice, and additionally they are expected to coach optimally during competitions (Chan & Mallett, 2011).

A particular factor that influences coaches' performance is their emotions and how they control them. Thelwell and colleagues (2008) reported that the coach appraisal of their own emotions and regulation of emotions were significantly correlated with all the CES subscales. The authors concluded that emotional intelligence can facilitate coaches' confidence and consequently, their behaviours and suggested that if coaches are unable to appraise and regulate

their own emotions, then their athletes' performance can be hindered. Along the same line, a study by Nelson and colleagues (2013) investigated the relationship between emotion, cognition, and behaviour in the coaching context. They interviewed the head coach of a semi-professional soccer team and their findings revealed that the coach felt it was important to conceal his emotions as a way to optimize athlete performance. Another study by Bloom, Durand-Bush, and Salmela (1997) examined pre- and post-competition routines of 21 expert Canadian coaches. Amongst their results, the researchers found that before a regular season competition the coaches engaged in mental rehearsal of the possible scenarios that could happen during a game and this allowed them to plan their emotional reactions. In addition to being in control of their emotions during a game, the coaches also felt that they had to be in control of their emotions after a game. Therefore, they engaged in activities that helped them balance their emotions before talking with the team. Although these findings provided some insights on the importance of coaches' emotional regulation during the regular season, it did not examine coaches' emotional preparation for a National Championship Tournament. In the current study, the participants mentioned that the National Championship was an emotionally demanding moment for them too. Some of the coaches mentioned that they mismanaged their emotions while coaching at their first National Championship and this affected the outcome of the games. Consequently, they realized about the importance of controlling their emotions during this event and started to engage in activities that allowed them to maintain composure. For example, some of the coaches meditated, avoided the media, and made sure to have a positive body language and positive attitude throughout the tournament. These findings appear to be in line with two of the five components of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998): *self-awareness* and *self-regulation*. Self-awareness is the ability to identify and understand one's own emotions and their effect on others. Self-

regulation is the ability to control one's emotions in order to effectively respond to the stimuli (Goleman, 1998). The current findings suggest that coaches need to devote time to reflect on their emotional behaviours, which will allow them to learn more about themselves as coaches and how to perform better. These results extend our understanding of the coach's personal characteristics of the coaching model (Côté et al., 1995) by demonstrating how emotion awareness and regulation influences the organization and competition components of the coaching process.

In sum, the coaches indicated that participating in a National Championship Tournament was emotionally demanding for both athletes and coaches. The coaches identified strategies that allowed them to manage their athletes' emotions and their own emotions as well. It appears that emotions play a key role in both athletes' and coaches' performance. Therefore, a coaches' ability to notice, understand, and regulate emotions is essential for coaches to facilitate their athletes' and their own development as performers. The current findings suggest that in addition to knowing about the technical, tactical, and physical aspects of their sport, successful coaches also know how to effectively manage emotions.

Experience is Overrated Until you Have It

The participants believed that engaging in self-reflection of past experiences at National Championship Tournaments, reading books, attending coaching conferences, interacting with other coaches, and having a more experienced mentor were all sources that allowed them to modify their coaching skills and behaviours, and consequently, helped them prepare their teams for continued success at National Championship Tournaments. Previous research has demonstrated that coaches were high achievers who constantly looked for new information and ways to help them improve, even after reaching the top of their profession (Bloom & Salmela,

2000; Jones & Spooner, 2006). A large body of research has examined coaches' knowledge acquisition and has found that one of the coaches' primary sources of knowledge acquisition and development was their own experiences as athletes and early coaching experiences (e.g., Cregan, Bloom, & Reid, 2007; Erickson, Côté, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Gilbert, Côté, & Mallett, 2006; Salmela, 1994). Although there is a broad body of research on how coaches acquired their knowledge to prepare their teams, there is limited research on how coaches have taken the knowledge they acquired and used it to prepare their teams for major competitions, such as the National Championship Tournament.

In the current study, all the coaches were unsatisfied with their first experience coaching at a National Championship. Most of the coaches felt they did not have the knowledge to prepare the athletes and support staff for these high-level competitions. Interestingly, none of the participants won the National title the first time they participated at the tournament, and they all felt personally responsible for their teams underperforming at their first National Championship. They reflected on their experiences and identified aspects that needed to be improved. For example, some of the coaches wrote notes for themselves about things they thought had negatively influenced the athletes' performance; these notes were used to improve their team performance at subsequent tournaments. This finding appears to be in line with the intrapersonal knowledge component of Côté and Gilbert's (2009) definition of coaching effectiveness, which refers to the "understanding of oneself and the ability for introspection and reflection" (p. 311). Research in coaching psychology has continuously demonstrated the influence and importance of self-reflection. For example, Gallimore, Gilbert, and Nater (2013) investigated a 10-year journey of an American high school basketball coach who turned around his program by applying the lessons he learned from one of the most renowned coaches of all times, John

Wooden. Data was gathered through interviews and conversations with the high school coach, media documents, systematic observation of practices, and interviews with the school administrator and the coach's former players. In particular, after talking with coach Wooden, reading his books, and conversing with his colleagues, he noticed that he needed to invest more time in developing detailed practice plans, modify his instructional talk during practice, and make practices more similar to games. Gallimore and colleagues' (2013) study demonstrated that reflective practice throughout a career was a key factor for improving coaching skills and athletes' performance. Along the same line, Gilbert and Trudel (2001) studied six model youth sport coaches with the purpose of understanding how these coaches learned to coach through experience. Data was collected during a season through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documents. This study revealed that coaches developed their coaching strategies through reflection, which the authors described as a process that started when coaches identified an issue, then they generated a plan and strategies to deal with the issue, they applied their strategies, and finally they evaluated the effectiveness of the strategy. In sum, although these two studies have demonstrated the importance of reflection for high school and youth sport coaches, the relationship between reflection and effective coaching behaviours, particularly at the elite level, still remains unclear (Cushion & Nelson, 2013), including how it influences preparations for competition.

The findings of the current study demonstrated that the coaches spent considerable time reflecting on each trip to the tournament and on how they could improve their coaching skills. During this process, the coaches read books on leadership, motivation and successful entrepreneurs, attended coaching conferences, and interacted with other coaches. These were all sources that allowed them to develop strategies to improve their coaching skills. This finding is

consistent with Cushion's (2011) explanation of an effective reflective practice. According to Cushion, reflection ranges from mere descriptions of an issue to deep and critical reflection of the situation. Moreover, it requires time, commitment, and effort (Gilbert & Trudel, 2006). Based on the current findings, it appears that self-reflection was an important source of knowledge acquisition for coaches to prepare their teams to compete successfully at a National Championship. The current findings have demonstrated that self-reflection was an ongoing process by which coaches learned how to improve not only their athletes' skills but also their coaching skills and behaviours. Furthermore, these results demonstrated that even after reaching the highest point in their careers, successful coaches constantly engaged in self-reflection to find ways to improve.

In addition to self-reflection, the participants also felt that having a more experienced mentor helped them succeed in their careers. In the current study, four of the coaches mentioned that their mentors guided them in the process of preparing their teams for the National Championship Tournament. However, the starting point of their mentoring experiences was different for all of them. For example, two of the coaches realized they needed a mentor after their unsuccessful experience coaching at their first National Championship whereas the other coaches mentioned that their mentoring experience began before participating at a National Championship. Although their mentoring experiences were different, all the coaches are still in contact with their mentors and part of their reflective learning includes working with them. For example, the coaches mentioned they conversed with their mentors throughout the season to clarify technical or tactical questions, to work on their leadership and management skills, and on the human aspect of coaching. This finding is in line with previous research on mentoring in sport where mentoring is considered a holistic process, which entails more than just aspects of

the game, it is also about sharing beliefs and values about coaching (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2003). Mentoring has been defined as a non-familial, non-romantic relationship (Bloom, 2013), where the individual with more experience and knowledge (i.e., the mentor) guides and supports the less experienced individual (i.e., the protégé; Hoffmann & Loughead, 2015). There is a large body of research on mentoring in the organizational and educational contexts (Bloom, 2013; Hoffmann & Loughead, 2015). In both fields, mentoring has been associated with numerous positive outcomes. For example, mentored individuals have reported higher job satisfaction (Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002), greater career success (Riley & Wrench, 1985), and improved self-confidence (Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, & O'Brien, 1995). Although research on mentoring has increased over the past three decades, research on mentoring in the sport context has been given less attention (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2015). Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, and Salmela (1998) interviewed Canadian Olympic coaches and found that these coaches were mentored during their athletic careers up until the middle stages of their coaching careers. The coaches' relationship with their mentors helped them acquire technical, tactical, and physical knowledge, and also helped them shape their coaching philosophies. These findings are consistent with the current study, which revealed that the most valuable experience of having a mentor was that they learned about the psychological and emotional side of coaching, and how to manage themselves. The findings of this study add to the current body of literature on mentoring by demonstrating that even after reaching the highest point in their careers, coaches still seek out their mentors' guidance and support as it enhances their reflective learning process.

Chapter 6

Summary

Coaches are at the core of their athletes' success and satisfaction. Despite research indicating the importance of coaches' influence on athletes' performance, few studies have been devoted to understanding how coaches develop and maintain programs that consistently achieve success at high-level competitions. The purpose of this study was to investigate highly successful Canadian university coaches' perceptions on how they prepared themselves and their teams for continued success at National Championship Tournaments.

The participants of this study were six of the most successful Canadian university team sport coaches. All of the participants were current head coaches of interacting sport teams. They all had been in their current coaching position for at least five years. Finally, they had participated in at least four National Championship Tournaments and had won at least one National Championship title. Together, the participants had combined to win 16 Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) coach of the year awards and more than 30 National titles.

The principal investigator collected data through six, individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The interviews followed a predetermined interview guide that was created by the research team. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim and ranged between 50 and 100 minutes in length. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the participants confidentiality. The interviews were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) guidelines for thematic analysis.

The analysis resulted in five higher-order themes: planning is key for success, excellence has no limits, communicating expectations to athletes and support staff, effective emotional management, and experience is overrated until you have it. *Planning is key for success* pertains

to the coaches' meticulous seasonal planning, which began with the first day of training camp and culminated with the National Championship game. *Excellence has no limits* discusses the coaches' philosophy on building a culture of excellence in their programs. *Communicating expectations to athletes and support staff* describes the importance of communicating roles and expectations to athletes and support staff throughout the season, especially before leaving to the National Championship Tournament venue. *Effective emotional management* refers to the coaches' ability to control their athletes' emotions as well as their own emotions at the National Championship Tournament. Finally, *experience is overrated until you have it* explains how coaches acquired their knowledge to help them have success in their careers. In sum, it was the combination of these factors that allowed these coaches to develop and sustain extraordinary programs.

Conclusions

Planning is key for Success

- Coaches elaborated detailed plans that included the first day of training camp up to and including the National Championship game.

- Coaches believed that every part of their daily preparations during the regular season helped prepare them for the National Championship Tournament.

- Coaches highlighted the importance of maintaining routines throughout the season that would carry over to the National Championship Tournament.

- The administrative responsibilities for the event, such as scheduling study time and meals, were taken care of before leaving to the tournament venue.

Excellence has no Limits

- Coaches built a culture where they demanded high levels of technical, tactical, physical, and mental excellence in training.

- Coaches noted that practices were shorter in duration, but involved the same intensity, in the days leading up to and during the National Championship Tournament.

Communicating Expectations to Athletes and Support Staff

- Coaches felt that communicating with their athletes and support staff on a regular basis throughout the season helped prepare them for their roles at the Championship Tournament.

- Prior to leaving for the tournament venue, the coaches described the championship format to their athletes to help them avoid any unusual distractions.

- Coaches reiterated their expectations to their support staff in the days leading up to the tournament.

Effective Emotional Management

- Competing at the National Championship was emotionally demanding for both players and coaches.

- Coaches believed it was essential to help their athletes control their emotions. Therefore, coaches implemented activities that addressed the athletes' confidence before National Championship competitions.

- Coaches also had to manage their own emotions at the tournament. This was accomplished by meditating, dealing with the media intelligently, having a positive body language and positive attitude throughout the tournament.

Experience is Overrated Until you Have It

- Coaches were dissatisfied with their first experience coaching at a National Championship Tournament. They mentioned that reflecting about their first experiences helped them modify their coaching behaviours and strategies that they thought helped their teams perform better at subsequent National Championships.

- Coaches spent considerable time reflecting after each trip to Nationals and how they could improve their coaching skills and their teams' performance. This involved a combination of reading books, attending coaching conferences, and interacting with other coaches.

- Coaches espoused the importance of acquiring a more experienced mentor coach.

Practical Implications

The current study provided one of the first empirical accounts of preparing for a National Championship Tournament from the perspective of the coach. Research has primarily focused on the athletes' perspectives on preparing for major competitions and coaches' preparations for regular season contests. The results of this study add to the current body of literature in coaching psychology by providing insights on how some of the most successful university coaches in Canada prepared themselves and their teams for success at National Championship Tournaments from the coaches' perspective. The participants shared both the day-to-day and yearly preparations involved in maintaining a successful sports program.

The results of the current study described effective seasonal planning. More specifically, the coaches talked about the importance of developing championship routines starting the first day of the season. Coaches are advised to develop routines that include the physical and

emotional demands of a National Championship and maintain these routines during the whole season including the tournament. Additionally, the participants highlighted the importance of incorporating athletes' academic duties in their seasonal plans. University athletes and coaches may benefit from these results by understanding the importance of balancing the athletes' academic and athletic careers.

The participants valued the importance of communication throughout the season, and especially as it pertains to the National Championship Tournament. This finding is essential for both head coaches and support staff because understanding the importance of role clarification increases the teams' perceptions of group cohesion, and consequently, team performance. For example, some coaches asked the senior players to talk with the first-year players to share their experiences of playing at a National Championship. Other coaches met with the support staff to elaborate a plan for the tournament where every activity (e.g., team meetings, dinner time, opening ceremony) was specified. These findings are essential for head coaches as they show the importance of delegating responsibilities to the senior players and support staff before the National Championship. This may help coaches control their stress levels during this critical time of the season.

The importance of managing both athlete and coach emotions emerged in this study. In addition to learning about the physical, technical, and tactical aspects of their sport, coaches should also devote time to learn about their athletes' feelings about competition, and investigate and develop strategies to help them regulate their athletes' emotions. These results are of interest to head and assistant coaches who should allocate time in their training sessions to provide the athletes with an opportunity to share their feelings and ideas of how the coach can help them manage their emotions during competition.

The coaches highly valued the outcome of engaging in self-reflection. The participants reflected after each National Championship in order to understand the factors that negatively and positively influenced the teams' performance during the season and during the tournament. These results are of interest to head and assistant coaches who should be encouraged to attend conferences, read books that are not necessarily related to their sport (e.g., leadership, motivation, personality), and interact with other coaches. Most importantly, coaches are advised to reach out for a mentor, an individual who they believe can help them develop their coaching behaviours and interpersonal skills.

Limitations and Recommendations

Although the current study offered important insights on university coaches' experiences and strategies used to prepare their teams for success at National Championship Tournaments, some limitations need to be addressed. First, the participants were coaches of interacting team sports, which could limit the generalizability of the current results. Coaches of coactive team sports (e.g., track and field) or individual sports (e.g., figure skating) may face other issues or needs. For example, figure skating competitions involve uninterrupted routines, where coaches do not have time to interact with the skaters while performing. Therefore, these coaches may require more pre-competition strategies to help the skaters to be focused, confident, and motivated before entering to the ice rink. Second, the findings were based on the coaches' perceptions of their personal experiences, which may differ from the athletes' perceptions. Future research could investigate the athletes' perceptions on their experiences preparing and participating at a National Championship Tournament. Third, the results of the current study may only be relevant to university head coaches in the CIS and may only be applicable to National Championship Tournaments in Canada. Therefore, future research could investigate both

university athletes' and coaches' perceptions and experiences of preparing for a National Championship in other countries. For example, in the United States, the National Collegiate Athletic Association receives more attention than the CIS, therefore, coaches and athletes may experience more and different challenges when playing at the National Championship Tournament. Finally, the current results were based on the perspective of six of the most successful CIS coaches in Canada, which can differ from the perceptions of coaches who have not had success at the National level. Therefore, future research could compare successful university sport programs with less successful ones and identify the characteristics and variables that differentiate these programs. For example, do less successful coaches incorporate many of the preparations that the current participants mentioned as essential for success? If they have a similar approach, then is it due to athletes' talent or the university's economic resources that provide the athletes with a better environment for success? By comparing these two groups, sport psychology practitioners will have a more global understanding of the factors that go into play in major competitions and can help coaches lead their programs to sustained levels of excellence.

In conclusion, there are numerous factors that go into preparing for success at a National Championship Tournament, which include meticulous planning, fostering a culture of excellence, effective communication, emotional management skills, and self-reflection. Because coaches are the leaders of their teams and are in charge of their players' performance, success, and satisfaction, it is necessary to continue moving forward with this line of research to further understand how coaches maintain programs that achieve continuous success at high-level competitions.

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Appendix A
Coaching Model (CM)
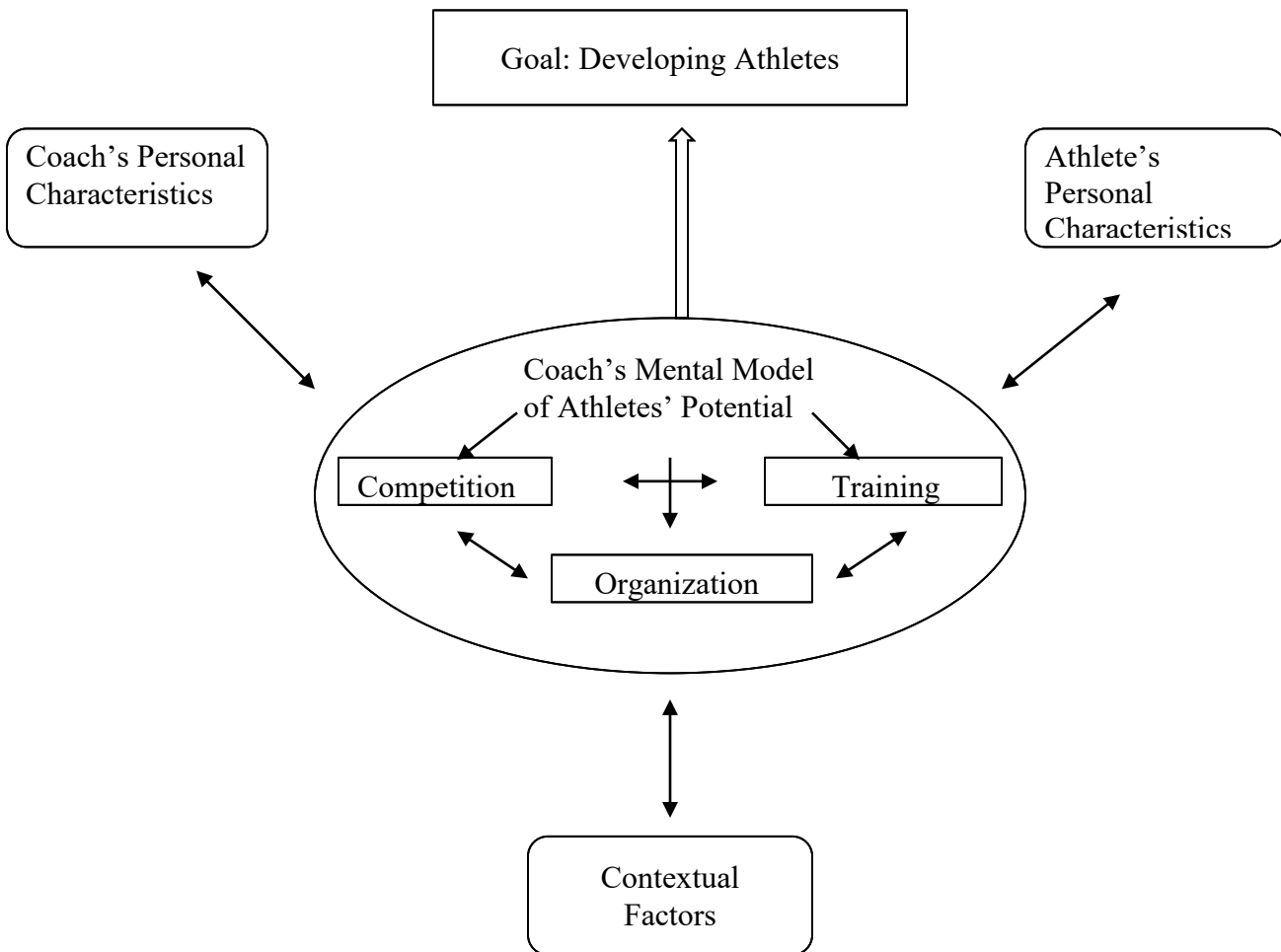
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Côté, J., Salmela, J. H., Trudel, P., Baria, A., & Russell, S. J. (1995). The coaching model:

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Appendix B
Recruitment Script

Dear _____,

My name is Daniela Donoso and I am currently completing a Master's degree in sport psychology under the supervision of Dr. Gordon A. Bloom in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at McGill University. Based on your exemplary coaching credentials and accomplishments, particularly having won a national championship, we are contacting you to invite you to participate in our research on coaches' perceptions of preparing to coach in a championship game.

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

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

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

Sincerely,
Daniela Donoso

Daniela Donoso, B.A.   Gordon A. Bloom, Ph.D.
Master's Candidate, Sport Psychology   Associate Professor
Dept. of Kinesiology & PE   Dept. of Kinesiology &PE
McGill University, Montreal   McGill University, Montreal
daniela.donoso@mail.mcgill.ca   gordon.bloom@mcgill.ca

Appendix C
Informed Consent Form

This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts for Daniela Donoso, a graduate student in sport psychology, in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at McGill University. You are invited to participate in our research study that is titled Canadian University Coaches' Perceptions of Preparing for Championship Games. If you choose to participate in this study you will be requested, without payment, to partake in a 1-2 hour audiotaped interview where you will be asked to discuss your perceptions on coaching in a national championship game. If more information is necessary, then a follow-up telephone interview may occur.

Once the interview is complete, you will have the opportunity to edit any comments you made during the interview at your discretion. You will also receive a typed transcription of the interview, which may be edited at your discretion. Prior to publication, you will receive copies of the results and conclusions of the study. The information you provide will **remain confidential**. The principal investigator (Daniela Donoso) and the faculty supervisor (Dr. Gordon A. Bloom) will be the only individuals to have access to identifiable data. All data, including audio files of the recorded interview(s) and digital copies of the consent form, will be securely stored in encrypted folders on a password-protected computer for a period of seven years. Any paper copies will be converted to digital files and, promptly, destroyed. Pseudonyms will be used to label all digital files. All data will be destroyed seven years after the study ends. The information disclosed during the interview will remain confidential and will be used for publication purposes and scholarly journals or for presentations at conferences. The researchers will not disclose names or identify the study participants at any time. The McGill Research Ethics Board has reviewed this study for compliance with its ethical standards. **<u>Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory. You are free to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw your participation or data at any time, for any reason without penalty or prejudice.</u>**

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

Do you agree **(Please check Yes □ No □)** to the audio-taping of the interviews with the understanding that these recordings will be used solely for the purpose of transcribing these sessions.

_____   _____
Signature   Date
Daniela Donoso   Gordon A. Bloom, Ph.D.
Master's Candidate, Sport Psychology   Associate Professor
Dept. of Kinesiology & PE   Dept. of Kinesiology & PE
McGill University, Montreal, Quebec   McGill University, Montreal, Quebec
daniela.donoso@mail.mcgill.ca   gordon.bloom@mcgill.ca

Appendix D
Interview Guide

Pre-Interview Routine

      Introduction

      Consent Form

Opening Questions

1. Briefly, tell me about your athletic career. Please highlight any experiences with championships you might have participated in as an athlete.

2. Please briefly describe your coaching career from its beginning to your current position.

Key Questions

3. Talk to me about your experience during your first Championship Tournament.
    a. How did you feel?
    b. Emotions/Feelings/Knowledge

4. How did you know how to prepare your team the first time you qualified for a National Championship Tournament? In what ways did it differ the following times you qualified?
    a. Your experiences as an athlete
    b. Other coaches
    c. Other people (athletic directors, former athletes, mentors)

5. When and how do you start preparing for a National Championship Tournament?

6. Tell me about your personal planning and preparations once your team qualifies for the National Championship Tournament?
    a. Demands on your time/Scheduling
    b. Additional university support

7. Tell me about the planning and preparations for the athletes and support staff you take care of as soon as you qualify for the National Championship Tournament?

   a. Accommodations

   b. Family members/tickets

   c. Academics

8. Compare the training plan for your team during a season to the time when you find out you have qualified for the National Championship Tournament until you arrive to the venue?

   a. Mental/Tactical/Physical/Technical

9. Based on what we have talked, how does preparing for a National Championship competitions differ from preparing for a regular-season game?

Summary Question

10. Over the years, what have you learned and/or believe is important for coaches to consider during the National Championship Tournament?

   a. What do you wish you knew the first time you attended a National Championship Tournament?

   b. Successes

   c. Failures

Concluding Questions

11. Would you like to add something else related to our interview?

12. Do you have any final comments or questions?

Appendix E
Demographic Questionnaire

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. E-mail:

4. What sports have you played at a competitive level since you were 13 years

old?

5. What sports have you coached?

6. How long have you held your current coaching position?

7. What is the highest level of coaching certification you have completed?

8. How many National Championship Tournaments have you participated in as head coach?

9. Please list all the National Championships you have won as head coach.

10. What is your career winning percentage?