COACH LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF DIFFICULT ATHLETES

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Abstract

Coaching research has most often focused on positive coach and athlete behaviours and outcomes. However, less empirical attention has highlighted negative, problematic, and difficult athlete behaviours. Specifically, managing difficult athletes is part of a coach's role and responsibilities, so it is somewhat surprising that there is minimal research on the topic. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to investigate high performance coaches' experiences with difficult athletes, including how they effectively managed these individuals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Canadian Hockey League (CHL) coaches, who had an average of 21 years of coaching experience. The methodology of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) was used to better understand what difficult athletes were and how coaches managed these individuals by combining the strengths of thematic analysis with individual narrative accounts. The results indicated the coaches' common experiences with difficult athlete through five overarching themes: (a) instilling team culture, (a) difficult athlete characteristics, (c) fostering relationships, (d) managing difficult athletes, and (d) social influences and resources of difficult athletes. Specifically, difficult athletes were described as "negative star players" and "negative leaders" within the team, where they had a negative influence on teammates and impacted proper team functioning. The narrative accounts described that coaches learned how to manage difficult athletes through their personal experiences with them. The findings suggest that managing difficult athletes involves early identification, providing clear roles and expectations, enforcing consequences, and making progress through process goals to learn from mistakes. Coaches either transformed the difficult athlete behaviour by having them buy-in to team concepts or they were unable to make progress with them, which then led to the athlete being traded or deselected. The themes and narratives were synthesized to create the essence of the experience, which highlighted the coaches' commitment to athlete development by utilizing all of the resources at their disposal (e.g., assistant coaches, trainers, athlete leaders, billets). From a practical standpoint, this study provides insights for coaches, athletes, athletic directors, and general managers by highlighting the dynamic processes necessary to manage difficult athletes within an organization. As well, this study offers methodological implications for the application of transcendental phenomenology in the coaching sciences as an effective and systematic approach, along with theoretical implications for leader-member exchange theory within sport and group dynamics research.

Résumé

La recherche sur l'encadrement des entraîneurs s'est trop souvent concentré sur les comportements positifs des entraîneurs et des joueurs, ainsi que les résultats positifs obtenus. Par contre, peu de recherche empirique a démontré les problèmes, les difficultés et les comportements négatifs des athlètes. En particulier, la gérance des athlètes difficiles est une grande partie des responsabilités des entraîneurs. Alors, ceci est très surprenant qu'il y est peu de recherche à ce sujet. Par conséquent, le but de cette étude est d'enquêté sur les expériences des entraîneurs de haut calibre avec des athlètes difficiles, incluant l'encadrement de ceux-ci. Des entrevues semi-structuré ont été fait avec huit entraîneurs de la Ligue Canadienne de Hockey (LCH), qui avaient en moyenne 21 années d'expérience. La méthodologie de la phénoménologie transcendantale (Moustakas, 1994) a été utilisé pour mieux comprendre qu'est-ce qu'un athlète difficile et comment les entraîneurs encadrent ceux-ci en combinant les forces des analyses thématiques avec comptes narratifs individuels. Les résultats on indiqués que les entraîneurs expérimentent des situations similaires avec leurs athlètes difficiles à travers cinq thèmes: (a) inculquer une culture d'équipe, (b) les caractéristiques des athlètes difficiles, (c) favoriser les relations, (d) l'encadrement des athlètes difficiles et (d) les influences social et les ressources des athlètes difficiles. Particulièrement, les athlètes difficiles. Spécialement, les athlètes difficiles étaient décrit comme des «joueurs étoiles négatifs» et des "meneurs négatifs» à l'intérieur de l'équipe, où ceux-ci avaient une influence sur leurs coéquipiers et le fonctionnement de l'équipe. Le narrateur a décrit que les entraîneurs apprenaient des situations qu'ils ont expérimentées par eux-mêmes. Les résultats nous informent que l'encadrement des athlètes à problèmes commence par l'identification précoce de ces derniers, en leur attribuant un rôle clair, en renforçant les conséquences et en utilisant des objectifs pour identifier leur progrès lorsqu'ils apprennent de leurs erreurs. Les entraîneurs ont soit transformé le comportement de leur athlète à problème en le faisant acheter le concept d'équipe ou ils n'étaient pas capable de faire de progrès avec lui ce qui a mené l'athlète à être échangé ou retrancher. Les thèmes et les narrations ont été résumé pour recréer l'essence de leurs expériences, ce qui met en valeurs l'engagement des entraîneurs envers le développement de leurs athlètes utilisant toutes les ressources disponibles (assistant-entraîneurs, meneur de l'équipe, thérapeutes, famille d'accueil). Du côté pratique, cette étude renseigne les entraîneurs, athlètes, directeurs athlétiques et directeur-gérant sur le processus pour encadrer un athlète à problème à l'intérieur de l'organisation. Aussi, cette étude des méthodes dans l'application de ces phénomènes dans la science du « coaching » avec des modèles théoriques pour l'implication des meneurs de l'équipe dans un contexte sportif.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"*Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.*" – Vince Lombardi

When each individual commits to a group effort and they all come together to work as a cohesive unit, great things can be achieved. Conversely, when an individual is not committed to the group effort, the outcomes may be detrimental. Thus, the presence of an individual not committed to the group effort may lead to the dysfunction of a team, company, society, or civilization. With that understood, the dynamics of a group may be undermined by a single disruptive and difficult individual who is not committed to the team if they are not identified and managed by the groups leaders (Felps Mitchell, & Byington, 2006). In order for the team to be successful, the leaders must have these difficult individuals buy-in to the group's vision and values. If the individual's negative behaviour is not recognized it can spread contagiously to other members (Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2010). Research on coaching and leadership has explored and outlined how leaders should promote cohesion in the group dynamic (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 2002), however it is less known how leaders effectively manage these difficult members to promote their commitment and facilitate the proper group functioning.

To learn how these manage these difficult individuals, we must first learn more about the difficult individuals themselves. Minimal research has explored difficult athletes, however business, healthcare, and education provide relatable group settings that require individual commitment to be successful. In schools, teachers find themselves spending approximately 80% of their time with 20% of their students who exhibit behavioural issues (Brough, Bergmann, & Holt, 2013). Comparatively, business managers often find themselves dedicating a similar

amount of time towards motivating their difficult employees to improve performance and resolve the conflicts they create (Dunlop & Lee, 2004). Similar to teachers and managers, the role of a coach is to facilitate, moderate, and mold a group of diverse individuals into a cohesive unit that achieves success and member satisfaction (Bloom, Stevens, & Wickwire, 2003; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). In particular, coaches of interdependent sports such as hockey, football, and basketball have stated that the success of their team often relied on the collective effort of each individual athlete (Carron, Hausenblas, & Eys, 2005). However, dealing with difficult athletes is a major factor impeding the job of the coach, so it is somewhat surprising to learn that there is minimal research examining this topic (Cope, et al., 2010). As noted by Cope and colleagues: "These [difficult] athletes end up taking a lot of management time. If 80% of the time is spent with the negative players, not enough time is spent on reinforcing positive or good behaviours" (p. 430). This implies that managing difficult athletes consumes the coach's limited time and resources, and shifts their attention away from their other responsibilities. Thus, the presence of a difficult team member who withholds effort, expresses negative emotions, breaks team rules, and/or mistreats teammates can negatively affect the team in terms of cohesion, satisfaction, and performance, and inhibit the coach's ability to effectively fulfill their role (Cope et al., 2010).

Within the professional sport context, an example of a difficult team member would be Evander Kane, who is an athlete in the National Hockey League. As a member of the Winnipeg Jets, Kane was recognized for violating team rules, as well as his lack of effort and work ethic in games and practices (Peaslee, 2015). His behaviour led to an altercation with his teammates and resulted in Kane not showing up to one game. Kane had become such a "distraction" (Johnston, 2015) that he was traded to the Buffalo Sabres. Though, he continued to break rules in Buffalo, such as skipping a team practice to attend the 2016 NBA All-Star Game. While we do not know

what strategies, if any, the coaches implemented, it appears that Kane's behaviours affected the team environment in many adverse ways. Overall, research surrounding difficult members within the sport context is sparse. Though, other organizational contexts provide rich information about difficult members within group settings.

Researchers in organizational psychology have explored business (e.g., de Jong, Curseu, & Leenders, 2014; Dunlop & Lee, 2004; Felps et al.; Kerr et al., 2009) and healthcare sectors (e.g., Dixon-Woods, Yeung, & Bosk, 2011; Leiter, Laschinger, Day, & Oore, 2011; Osatuke, Moore, Ward, Dyrenforth, & Belton, 2009) to better understand the impact of difficult members on the workplace environment, and how to manage them effectively. Specifically, Felps and colleagues (2006) review suggested that difficult employees withheld effort, showed negative emotions, mistreated coworkers, defied managers, and violated social norms, which negatively impacted group outcomes of effectiveness, commitment, satisfaction, and performance. Operating at a high-level of performance is a critical component to any organizations success (Dalal, 2005), thus understanding how to effectively manage the individuals that inhibit high-level functioning is important to achieving positive group outcomes. Consequently, Felps and colleagues (2006) recommended responses to deal with these difficult employees that ranged from withdrawing a difficult member from the workplace to using motivational interventions such as providing constructive feedback and withholding praise, respect, or resources until the difficult members' behaviour changed. A similar motivational intervention strategy called CREW: Civility, Respect, Engagement in the Workplace (Osatuke et al., 2009) has been successfully used in the healthcare sector. The CREW process involves coworkers meeting weekly or biweekly to discuss appropriate and effective interpersonal interactions in the workplace with the assistance of trained facilitators. The CREW intervention demonstrated an

improvement in positive behaviours, job satisfaction, trust, and withdrawal in the workplace (Leiter et al., 2011; Osatuke et al., 2009). In sum, the intention of the program was to improve social processes in the group environment to increase group outcomes such as performance. Meanwhile, having a capable leader who facilitates these environments is also important, as effective leadership is essential to and responsible for the performance of organizations in both business and sport (Jones, 2002). Accordingly, leaders should identify and be aware of these difficult members as their destructive behaviour can spread widely throughout the group environment and hinder organizational performance. Business and sport represent similar organizational contexts with the role of head coaches comparable to business managers, working in performance-oriented environments (Jones, 2002). Therefore, examining leadership and difficult team members in sport may be useful and applicable across other contexts.

While sport research has yet to empirically link difficult athlete behaviour to team effectiveness and performance, the seminal writing of Ogilvie and Tutko (1966) discussed the behaviour of "problem athletes" in track and field, while empirical research has investigated "team cancers" (e.g., Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2011; Cope et al., 2010; McGannon, Hoffman, Metz, & Schinke, 2012) and "antisocial athlete behaviours" (Kavussanu, 2006), although the quantity of this literature remains limited. Ogilvie and Tutko (1966) posited that "problem athletes" fell into one of three categories: situational anxiety (e.g., lack of maturity and support), defensive personality disorders (e.g., motivated by fear, negative emotion, distrust, and nonconformity) and pathological disorders (e.g., disease or genetic imbalances), with the majority of coaching issues originating from athletes with defensive personality disorders. An important aspect of the defensive personality disorders category was the display of negative emotion. In particular, Cope and colleagues (2010) focused on these athletes who possessed

negative emotions that spread destructively throughout the team and labelled them “team cancers”. They interviewed ten Canadian university head coaches about these “team cancers” and found that the presence of a difficult athlete in the team setting created disruptions, negativity, and the formation of cliques, which negatively affected the team’s cohesion and performance (Cope et al., 2010). Furthermore, it was suggested that coaches used a variety of strategies to deal with these athletes such as tolerance, supervision, and discipline (Cope et al., 2010). The approaches these coaches used ranged from laissez-faire to transactional leadership, however the implementation of transformational leadership was not discussed. Overall, this exploratory study discussed the negative role of difficult athletes and how they can harm the team environment. Despite this information, the question of how these difficult athletes can be effectively managed and brought into the team’s culture still remains.

Although research on effective coaching strategies is well documented, information on the difficult, dysfunctional, negative, problematic, or cancerous athlete in sport and how to effectively manage them remains less developed. Previous literature has stated that effective coaches display transformational leadership (Loughead & Bloom, 2016), though it has not been explicitly examined as an effective strategy to manage difficult athletes. Therefore, looking at this approach among other leadership and coaching strategies that employ positive team behaviours and interpersonal interactions (e.g., relationships) may be important to provide coaches, managers, and educators with guidelines to sustain group effectiveness and performance. Within leadership and coaching, several theories (e.g., Full Range Leadership Theory: FRLT, Bass & Avolio, 1997; Leader-Member Exchange Theory: LMX, Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; 3+1C, Jowett & Cockerill, 2003) exist that specify behaviours, tactics, and strategies effective coaches and leaders could use to promote positive athlete behaviours and relationships.

More precisely, the FRLT posits that coaches who display transformational leadership behaviours of motivation, encouragement, stimulation, and inspiration elevate the performance and satisfaction of their athletes (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009). The 3+1C model theorizes that closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation define the relationship between the coach and the athlete. When the coach and athletes fulfill all four dimensions, positive outcomes such as performance and satisfaction occur (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett, 2007). LMX is also a relationship-based approach, which has gained prominence in organizational psychology (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX suggests that the leader has a limited amount of time and resources, thus the relationships they form with members are differentiated and unequal. The unequal relationships form in-groups (i.e., high-quality relationships) and out-groups (i.e., low-quality relationships) amongst members, with in-group exchanges characterized by trust, mutual respect, and obligation. Therefore, the leader establishing a high-quality relationship with the difficult athlete may help manage them successfully. In sum, the theories examined provide suggestions to effectively manage individuals working in high stress and performance-oriented environments, although theory will not guide or direct the current study, because of its exploratory nature.

The present study is an exploratory topic on a relatively underdeveloped area of research, therefore we will adopt a qualitative research design to allow the researcher to gather in-depth information to better understand expert coaches' experiences with difficult athletes (Creswell, 2013). An inductive approach to the data analysis allowed the researcher to build from the bottom-up in order for themes to emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Interviews were conducted since they are comparable to normal conversation while also providing detailed accounts about complex phenomenon such as difficult athletes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

Difficult athletes are present within most elite sport teams (Clark, 2003), and their behaviours can lead to harmful effects on team cohesion and performance (Cope et al., 2010). The primary objective of this study was to explore expert head coaches' experiences with difficult athletes in order to understand their impact on team processes and outcomes, along with the strategies coaches implement to effectively manage these individuals. The present study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the coach's perceptions of difficult athletes?
    - What athlete behaviours are the most challenging to manage?
    - What personal experiences have coaches had with difficult athletes?
    - What impact do difficult athletes have on the team environment?
    - What impact do difficult athletes have on team outcomes?
2. How has the coach managed difficult athletes?
    - How do coaches learn to manage difficult athletes?
    - How do coaching strategies impact the difficult athlete?
    - How do coaches use human resources (e.g., assistant coaches, team leaders) to help manage difficult athletes?

Significance of the Study

Regardless of the success or ability of the coach, it is clear that difficult athletes exist in all levels of sport, which makes it surprising that research is limited in this domain (Clark, 2003). The information gathered from this study expanded our knowledge on expert coach leadership behaviours, difficult athlete behaviours, team cohesion, team culture, and effective coaching strategies. Furthermore, the participants provided strategies to intervene and counteract with the

behaviour of difficult athletes, which is important to creating and preserving a positive team environment and culture that breeds success, consequently adding to literature on intervention strategies and winning cultures. Moreover, the results of the present study can be disseminated to coaching education programs to contribute to and enhance current coaching resources and practices. Finally, the findings from this study provides researchers with information to further explore the concept of difficult athletes at additional levels of coaching, through different sports, and across other group settings.

Delimitations

The present study denotes the following delimitations:

- All participants were male, head coaches of competitive male athletes.
- All participants were interdependent sport coaches of Canadian Hockey League teams.
- All participants had at least 10 years of experience at the performance coach level.
- All participants were full-time paid coaches.

Limitations

The present study denotes the following limitations:

- The results only reflect the perspectives of participating coaches and not all CHL coaches.
- The results may only be applicable to experienced performance level coaches.
- The results reflect the perspectives of head coaches.
- The results may only be applicable to difficult male hockey athletes.

Operational Definitions

Canadian Hockey League (CHL) – The world's largest development hockey league (Canadian Hockey League, n. d.). The league is comprised of 60 teams throughout North America with 52 teams in Canada and 8 in the northern United States, which are split into three geographic

associations: the Ontario Hockey League (OHL), Western Hockey League (WHL), and the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL).

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) – Helpful behaviours displayed in the workplace that go beyond the requirements of the job, and improve the functioning environment of the organization (Spector & Fox, 2010)

Counterproductive Workplace Behaviour (CWB) – Harmful behaviours displayed in the workplace that are directed towards either the organization or individuals within the organization, and have a detrimental effect on the satisfaction, well-being, and performance of coworkers (Spector & Fox, 2010).

Difficult Athlete –A difficult athlete is "an individual who chronically displays behaviour which asymmetrically impairs group functioning" (Felps et al., 2006, p. 180). Further, a difficult athlete must exhibit at least one of three behaviours: withholding effort, negative affect, and/of violating team norms (Felps et al., 2006).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter consists of two main sections. First, literature within organizational psychology will be explored to better understand how the behaviour of employees may impact organizations, along with strategies for supervisors to manage these behaviours. This will include a discussion of the bad apple phenomenon (Felps, Mitchell, & Byington, 2006). Second, literature in sport pertaining to the behaviours of athletes will be examined. Moreover, the role of the coach and their influence on athlete behaviour will be described. To better understand the relationship between the difficult athlete and coach, the leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) will be discussed.

Organizations and Organizational Behaviours

Performance is a critical component for organizations, while satisfaction is a critical component for employees. Therefore, understanding the variables that fulfill the needs of both parties is of clear concern (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Functional behaviours are essential to both organizational performance and employee satisfaction (Organ & Ryan, 1995). These functional behaviours have been described using a wide variety of terms, however they are more commonly referred to as organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB: Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983), with over 650 scientific articles published surrounding the concept (Podsakoff et al., 2009). OCB's are defined as helpful behaviours that go beyond requirements of the job, and improve the functioning environment of the organization (Podsakoff et al., 2009). More specifically, OCB's have been separated into two categories: with OCB directed toward improving the organization (OCBO) or individuals within the organization (OCBI). OCBO's consist of exhibiting civic virtue, conscientiousness, or sportsmanship, such as promoting

company values in the workplace, while OCBI's involve displaying altruism, courtesy, peacekeeping, or cheerleading characteristics, such as taking time to teach another coworker how to complete a job task properly (Dalal, 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2009). Overall, OCB's have been positively related to productivity, efficiency, profitability, and customer satisfaction, and negatively related to costs and employee absences (Podsakoff et al., 2009). Thus, supervisors may enhance an organizations performance and effectiveness by encouraging employees to display OCB's (Podsakoff et al., 2009). OCB's promote the functional way employees should act within the organization, however employees do not always conduct themselves in this manner.

While researchers have demonstrated that employees display functional behaviours, employees may also display dysfunctional behaviours that are harmful to organizational performance and have a detrimental effect on coworkers' satisfaction and well-being (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001; Penney & Spector, 2005). These dysfunctional behaviours have been described using several different terms, however they are most commonly referred to as counterproductive work behaviours (CWB). Moreover, CWB's can be separated into two categories, with the behaviours being directed toward the organization (CWBO) or individuals within the organization (CBWI: Penney & Spector, 2005). More precisely, CWBO's consist of explicit behaviours such as theft or sabotage, while CWBI's consist of implicit behaviours of hostility, withdrawal, and aggression, and may involve mistreatment of coworkers (Dalal, 2005). The strongest predictors of an employee's display of CWB's include perceived unfairness and poor leadership and have been related to negative emotions and frustration from coworkers along with increased conflict in the workplace and job stress (Hershcovis et al., 2007). Thus, organizations may enhance performance and effectiveness by treating employees equitably and by appointing those who possess strong leadership skills to management positions.

To conclude, the CWB construct is well researched, however it may be too broad to efficiently measure the individual-level behaviours that undermine organizations (Fox et al., 2001; O'Boyle Forsyth, & O'Boyle, 2011), guiding us towards the third and final organizational concept. Felps and colleagues (2006) labeled this individual construct as a 'bad apple'; a term describing how a single individual's chronically dysfunctional interpersonal behaviours can negatively impact the dynamics, processes, and outcomes of an entire group by decreasing performance, satisfaction, and well-being (Felps et al., 2006; see Appendix A). Felps and colleagues defined three distinct behaviours that identified a bad apple: (1) withholding of effort, (2) negative affect, and (3) violating interpersonal norms. The three constructs of this definition narrow the CWB construct by eliminating the explicit theft and sabotage behaviours because they do not directly impact coworkers but rather the organization. Furthermore, theft and sabotage are all organizational offenses that warrant termination, however the three bad apple behaviours are not terminable offenses (Felps et al., 2006). In sum, this means that supervisors are left with few options for bad apple employees and must work diligently to manage their behaviours in order to limit their impact on the remainder of the group or organization.

The central focus of investigating bad apple behaviour is to understand the negative actions that harm the group dynamics, processes, and outcomes of the organization (Felps et al., 2006). Employees persistently exhibiting bad apple behaviours have been found to generate severe consequences on the functioning of the group, by crippling employee satisfaction and morale, which diminishes organizational performance (Felps et al., 2006). For instance, Dunlop and Lee (2004) studied bad apple behaviours and their impact on team performance and organizational effectiveness. An anonymous self-report survey sampled (n = 364) employees, and (n = 96) supervisors at 36 fast-food chains to assess employee behaviours, performance (e.g.,

objective time measurements and subjective supervisor-ratings), and unaccounted for costs (Dunlop & Lee, 2004). The results yielded that bad apple behaviours affected both subjective and objective performance and organizational effectiveness (Dunlop & Lee, 2004). At the subjective-level, employees displaying bad apple behaviours were perceived as low performers by their supervisors, and at the objective-level, bad apple employee's service time performance was significantly worse than others (Dunlop & Lee, 2004). Therefore, the presence of bad apple behaviours disrupted the proper functioning of an organizational branch. Furthermore, when bad apple behaviours were compared to OCB's in assessing an organization's effectiveness, bad apple behaviour showed a stronger correlation. Thus, examining bad apple behaviours may be more beneficial to assess group performance (Dunlop & Lee, 2004). Additionally, an important implication to note was the two-year average tenure of employees, which may suggest that in the short-term bad apple behaviours may be more contagious than OCB's, and consequently, it may take more time to develop strong OCB's within team or organizational culture.

With the understanding that bad apple behaviours affect group performance and effectiveness, it is important to understand how these behaviours influence others within the group (Gino, Ayal, & Ariely, 2009). To address this issue, Gino and colleagues (2009) examined the contagion of bad apple behaviours in a two-part experimental design. The first experiment observed 141 university students in groups of 8 to 14, who were randomly assigned to one of four group conditions, where they completed a mathematical test and received money for correct answers (Gino et al., 2009). The condition groups were: no cheating control (no confederate), cheating allowed baseline (no confederate), cheating influence A (in-group confederate), or cheating influence B (out-group confederate). The results found that the cheating was more prominent with an in-group confederate cheater and less prominent with the presence of an out-

group confederate cheater. This indicates that the social status a person possesses within a group affects the influence their behaviour has on that group. With it evident that bad apple behaviours do indeed impact entire groups, it is now important to understand how they create this group-level dysfunction and the intervention strategies necessary to minimalize this phenomenon.

Understanding how one individual may facilitate the dysfunction of an entire group is essential in the management process of these individuals and to the design of intervention strategies to maintain organizational performance with them present. Specifically, Kerr and colleagues (2009) examined how one individual bad apple can undermine the entire group and what assists in the prevention of these bad apples from deterring the group in a two-part experimental design. In the first experiment, students (N = 356) participated in an online investment game within groups of five participants. The task consisted of each participant receiving $5 dollars to divide up between a personal and group account at their own discretion (Kerr et al., 2009). A bad apple was defined as a participant that allocated $0 to the group account. Participants were assigned to a low-threat (participants distribution of money was not shared with the group) or high-threat (participants distribution of money could be shared within the group and they could be excluded based on their decisions) condition. After participants divided up the their $5, the total funds of the group account were then doubled and distributed back evenly to its members, and then task was to be repeated. Before repeating the task in the high-threat condition, there was a group discussion and vote to exclude any members based on their money allocations. If any member received more than one vote to be removed then they would no longer be able to participate. The results showed that a single individual could deter the cohesive functioning of the group by significantly reducing its cooperation levels (Kerr et al., 2009). Further, it was determined that it was uncommon for others to follow the bad apple's

behaviour unless there were three or more present within the group. Thus, in order to influence the behaviour-change of group members to exhibit bad apple behaviours, the majority of team members must be displaying them. In the second experiment, students (N = 73) participated in a random assignment 2 (group size: 4 or 8) x 3 (social exclusion threat: absent, one threat, double threat) between-subjects experimental design. The risk of social exclusion was found to have no effect in the 8-person groups, however it had strong effects within the 4-person groups. Thus, group social identification was much larger within the small groups, determining that within larger groups, people are not as concerned about being excluded. This result may occur because exclusion in a small group may lead to being rejected as a lone outcast. Meanwhile, in a larger group the odds of exclusion are higher, and if exclusion occurs, other members may also be excluded or defect with them. Therefore, in a larger group social exclusion may be viewed as less intimidating. Overall, this study demonstrates that bad apple behaviours facilitate group functioning by undermining the team cooperation, however for others to follow that behaviour takes a significant portion of bad apples to be present. Further, the threat of social exclusion or promotion of social identity may provide a potential intervention strategy to help prevent bad apple behaviour within groups. Finally, Kerr and colleagues (2009) future recommendations called for a better understanding of when and why bad apples behaviours deter the productive functioning of an entire group and how this deterioration can be prevented.

Historically, research in organizational psychology has provided foundational knowledge for coaching science researchers to better understand difficult team member behaviours within sport settings. However, most—if not all—of the previous research on these difficult members in organizational settings has been developed using quantitative methods. The present study will attempt to answer the following question of: what difficult (e.g., bad apple) athletes do to

deteriorate the group functioning and, how their impact can be prevented by examining expert coaches' management strategies using qualitative research methods.

Sport Teams and Sport Behaviours

An imperative role of the coach is to facilitate the formation of a group of individuals into a functioning and cohesive unit (Bloom, Stevens, & Wickwire, 2003). With such importance placed on coaches to create a cohesive unit, part of their job involves having organizational skills that allow them to implement and sell a vision to their team (Vallée & Bloom, 2005). In order for the team vision to work in interdependent sports, athletes must "buy-in" to the coaches' vision, and hence work collectively with teammates towards a common goal (Bloom et al., 2003). In most cases, research has focused on athletes who buy-in to their coaches' vision (Salmela, 1996; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). This suggests that researchers may have neglected a small but important sample of athletes – those who do not buy-in to their coaches' vision (e.g., difficult athletes). The following section will examine the social processes that enhance and diminish team outcomes (Martin, Bruner, Eys, & Spink, 2014). Furthermore, these processes will be narrowed down to specifically address difficult athletes that can diminish the functional outcomes of a sports team (Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2010), along with coach leadership strategies to manage these athletes and counteract potential negative outcomes (Bennie & O'Connor, 2012).

Performance is a vital team outcome to achieve success in sport, while satisfaction is a critical outcome for most athletes. Therefore, understanding the processes that enhance both outcomes is of clear importance. Within sport, cohesion is one of the key team processes that assist a group of athletes in achieving these team outcomes (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 2002; Eys et al., 2015). Carron, Colman, Wheeler, and Stevens (2002) conducted a meta-analysis that examined the relationship between cohesion and performance. The literature search

identified 46 independent studies and determined that cohesion and performance are strongly correlated. Therefore, the findings suggest that to improve performance, teams should devise strategies to build cohesion within their group. Moreover, to support the cohesion-performance link, Tekleab, Quigley, and Tesluk (2009) examined 53 teams longitudinally over three time periods and found that team cohesion was not only positively related to perceived performance, but also athlete satisfaction and team confidence. Furthermore, Turman (2003) conducted interviews with athletes on their perceptions of coaching strategies in sports teams. The results revealed that coaching strategies either promoted or deterred cohesion. Thus, coaching strategies are critical to the cohesion and performance of the team, but more significantly the athlete must perceive these strategies as useful for them to be effective. Therefore, coach-athlete relationships may be more important to cohesion than coach leadership behaviours (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004), and using qualitative research methods would allow us to gain rich and detailed descriptions of coaches' experiences (Creswell, 2013).

The coach-athlete relationship itself is a dynamic process between the coach and each individual athlete. It assumes that the relationship and behaviours of the coach are uniquely different with each individual athlete (Cranmer & Myers, 2014), whereas coach transformational leadership behaviours are assumed to be constant with each individual athlete (Price & Weiss, 2013). It is important to note that cohesion is also a dynamic process that changes over time (Martin et al., 2014), with social cohesion being more dynamic than task cohesion (Dunlop, Falk, & Beauchamp, 2013). Additionally, this suggests if social cohesion fluctuates more than task cohesion, monitoring a team's social settings may be more important than focusing solely on tasks (e.g., technical and tactical skills). Thus, athletes should have a positive social environment that fosters their personal growth and development, and when that environment is achieved,

teammates can then work together functionally towards tasks and performance (Vallée & Bloom, 2016). These findings demonstrate the importance of cohesion, in particular the social aspect of cohesion, and strategies that foster a cohesive environment.

Dysfunctional Athletes. While the behaviours, actions, and attitudes of athletes may enhance team the environment and cohesion, they may also deter it and lead to feelings of frustration and angst rather than fulfillment. The distinction between these two opposing types of athletes can be viewed as functional athlete behaviours (prosocial; Kavussanu, 2006) referring to actions intended to assist or benefit the team or an individual within the team, or dysfunctional athlete behaviours (antisocial; Kavussanu, 2006) involving those who display behaviour that is intended to harm or disadvantage the team or individuals within the team. Moreover, these dysfunctional athlete behaviours can lead to the obstruction of team outcomes by negatively affecting the group dynamics and performance of a team (Paradis, Carron, & Martin, 2014).

Dysfunctional athlete behaviours and the issues they create are an inevitable part of life and relationships (Paradis et al., 2014), and if left unaddressed, they can create conflict within the team and have serious implications on team outcomes (Paradis et al., 2014). To address this phenomenon, Sullivan and Feltz (2001) surveyed men's ice hockey players on six separate teams and found that negative conflict styles were negatively related to task and social cohesion, while positive conflict styles were positively related to social cohesion. Moreover, Holt, Knight, and Zukiwski (2012) found that conflicts may ensue inside and outside the formal team atmosphere and can lead to negative outcomes. Also, Paradis and colleagues (2014) interviewed university athletes and determined that conflict can manifest through three mechanisms: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. The cognitive component stems from disagreements and differences in opinions and viewpoints. The affective component refers to negative emotions and feelings

such as anger, frustration, jealousy, and irritation. Meanwhile, the behavioural component refers to attitudes and actions athletes exemplified such as negative body language, interference of goal attainment, avoidant behaviour, silent treatment, and verbal and physical fighting (Paradis et al., 2014). In sum, these identified components demonstrate three dysfunctional behaviours displayed by athletes that should be monitored by athlete leaders and coaches as precursors of conflict and decreased cohesion, which if left unaddressed may lead to negative team outcomes.

Teammates that display these negative behaviours have been referred to as problem athletes (Clark, 2003) and cancer athletes (Cope et al., 2010) within the literature, however for the purpose of this study they will be termed difficult athletes. Clark (2003) noted that difficult athletes are unavoidable, can remove the enjoyment of sport, and may even jeopardize an entire program through the spread of negative contagion. Furthermore, Clark suggested that difficult athletes display a wide array of negative behaviours that include withholding effort, displaying negative emotions and attitudes, and defying team norms. Athletes who withhold effort are repeatedly late for team functions and loaf in their practices and games. While, athletes with negative emotions and attitudes displayed sulking, moping, anger, and frustration towards their teammates others involved in the team environment. Additionally, athletes who defy team norms mistreat their teammates, disrespect their teammates and coaches, and break team rules. Moreover, Cope and colleagues (2011) examined the roles of athletes on sports teams and found that athletes fulfilled a variety of positive and negative informal roles that were an integral part of the structure of sports teams, and were related to positive and negative individual and group-level processes and outcomes such as cohesion, satisfaction, and performance. Notably, of the negative informal roles, the team cancer was found to be most detrimental to their respective

sports team (Cope et al., 2011). The team cancer was described as "an athlete who expressed negative emotions that spread destructively throughout the team" (Cope et al., 2011, p. 24).

To better understand this phenomenon, Cope and colleagues (2010) conducted semi-structured interviews with Canadian university coaches to gain their perspective on the negative informal role of the cancer athlete. The results highlighted that difficult athlete's created distractions, negativity, and the formation of cliques that led to consequences on team outcomes (Cope et al., 2010). Thus, understanding how to effectively manage these difficult athletes is of clear importance to proper team functioning. Cope and colleagues had coaches share strategies they employed to manage difficult athletes, which included: direct and indirect communication, athlete supervision, discipline, removal, pre-screening, and toleration of the difficult athlete. Overall, a large array of leadership strategies that ranged from laissez-faire approaches of tolerance to transactional approaches of punishment, however transformational approaches of effective coaching to manage these difficult athletes were not discussed (Cope et al., 2010).

Coach Leadership. According to Loughead and Bloom (2016), effective coaches display transformational leadership behaviours more than laissez-faire or transactional leadership behaviours. Therefore, coaches' utilization of transformational leadership behaviours may act as an intervention strategy for effectively managing difficult athletes. Transformational leadership focuses on building relationships with followers based on emotional, personal, and inspirational exchanges, with the goal of developing the athlete through motivation to perform above their normal level of expectations (Bass, 1985; Loughead & Bloom, 2016). Furthermore, coaches that exhibit transformational leadership have been shown to predict coaching effectiveness, athlete satisfaction, and athlete performance (Rowold, 2006). Transformational leadership has been characterized in the sport literature through the display of six behaviours: (1) *inspirational*

motivation where leaders develop and articulate a vision to be achieved and inspire followers, (2) *appropriate role-modelling* by setting an example consistent with their values for followers to emulate, (3) *individual consideration* involves understanding that each athlete has different needs and shows respect and concern for these followers needs and feelings, (4) *intellectual stimulation* where the leader challenges followers to think about issues and problems in new ways and how they can be solved, (5) *high performance expectations* by expressing expectations for followers to achieve excellence, quality, and/or high performance, and (6) *fostering acceptance of group goals and teamwork* by developing a strong motivation in followers that promotes cooperation amongst them to work together towards a common goal (Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009). Overall, transformational leadership behaviours have been associated with positive team processes and outcomes such as team cohesion (Callow et al., 2009), motivation and effort (Smith, Young, Figgins, & Arthur, 2017), and well-being (Rowold, 2006), and may be an effective strategy for coaches to manage difficult athletes.

Recently, Smith and colleagues (2017) purposefully sampled nine professional cricket players from three separate teams, in which their head coach and captain had been identified as exemplifying the high levels of transformational leadership behaviours in a previous study. The athletes were interviewed to gain their perspective on the effective transformational leadership behaviours that their head coach and team captain exhibited within the team structure. Coaches demonstrated an ability to understand athletes within the team individually and offered support tailored to each athlete. In addition, the coach was found to demonstrate behaviours outside of the transformational leadership domain that influenced their coaching effectiveness such as approachability for athletes seeking support and advice, honesty, maintaining an appropriate balance between friendly socialization and professional authority, as well as high-quality

communication and interpersonal skills (Smith et al., 2016). Thus, it may be important to assess the communication, interactions, and exchanges that the coach has with each athlete in order understand how leaders in sport inspire athletes. In sum, the coach and captain serve important functions within a team structure in facilitating the team towards a common goal and perform different leadership behaviours that may be complementary to achieve buy-in from their athletes.

The transformational leadership construct and coach-athlete relationship demonstrate that coach leadership is a complex, multidimensional construct (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2010). To coincide with this transformational leadership construct, Chelladurai and Riemer (1998) defined coach leadership as a behavioural process that is used to enhance athlete performance and satisfaction, a concept that has been widely accepted within the field of sport psychology. However, Vella and colleagues (2010) have argued that this definition may be insufficient, as coach leadership is not purely a behavioural process, but also involves complex social processes such as interpersonal relationships that incorporate interactions, influences, and exchanges. In fact, coaching and leadership are both inherently social processes on their own, therefore, any definition of coach leadership should be consistent with this understanding and should include the coach-athlete relationship (Vella et al., 2010).

Given the importance of the interpersonal interactions within the sport setting, a breadth of empirical evidence on the coach-athlete relationship would be expected, however this may be challenging because minimal attention has emphasized this topic (Bennie & O'Connor, 2012). Specifically, Bennie and O'Connor determined that coach-athlete relationships fostered trust and respect and may enhance the team atmosphere, which in turn encourages athlete to be more receptive of coach feedback, team strategy decisions, training activities, and selections. Six items were found to promote trust and respect within the coach-athlete relationship: *open-door policy*,

honesty, *interest in athletes*, *dialogue*, *family atmosphere*, and *professional relationships* (Bennie & O'Connor, 2012). An open-door policy meant coaches were approachable and established rapport by building relationships with their athletes. Honesty helped build trusting and respectful relationships between the coach and the athlete, enabling them to buy-in to the coach's vision and overall objectives. Demonstrating interest in the athlete was a critical component to earn the respect and trust of the athletes through informal conversations outside of the sport context. Regular dialogue referred to coaches always communicating and offering to help athletes. The family atmosphere involved creating close relationships with all personnel involved with the team in order to work together to achieve team goals. Lastly, the coach maintained a close, professional relationship with the athletes to sustain their authoritative power over the team (Bennie & O'Connor, 2012). Overall, the relationships the coach established with athletes were a reflection of their coaching philosophy and the individual athletes wants, needs, and beliefs. Thus, the coach-athlete relationship between each individual athlete may be distinct from the next. In sum, Bennie and O'Connor concluded that "without a genuine relationship, management of the team falters because developing relationships assists coaches in managing the team, establishing a comfortable team environment, and enhancing communication between athletes and coaches" (p. 63). This demonstrates that the coaches interpersonal skills (Côté & Gilbert, 2009) and emotional intelligence (Chan & Mallett, 2011) are vital when reading each individual athlete's perceptions, wants, and needs in the development of relationships.

Within the literature, the social process of the coach-athlete relationship may help coaches manage difficult athletes (Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallarand, & Carbonneau, 2011). In particular, Jowett's (2007) 3+1C model of the coach-athlete relationship incorporates social processes within its constructs. Jowett and Poczwardowski (2007) define the coach-athlete

relationship as "a situation in which a coach's and an athlete's cognitions, feelings, and behaviours are mutually and casually interrelated" (p. 4). Jowett and Poczwardowski (2007) defined the coach-athlete relationship using four interpersonal constructs: *complementarity*, *closeness*, *commitment*, and *co-orientation*. Closeness is the emotional component reflected in trust, liking, caring, and respect; commitment is the cognitive component involving motivation to maintain a close relationship over time; and complementarity is the behavioural component involving interactions that are responsive, relaxed, and friendly (Jowett, 2007). Lastly, co-orientation refers to the mutual beliefs, values, goals, and interests, facilitated through strong communication. Taken together, these four components measure the interdependence between the coach and the athlete, with high measures of closeness, complementarity, commitment, and co-orientation associated with higher interdependence in the relationship (Jowett, 2007).

Research on the 3+1C model has been linked with team cohesion (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004), motivation (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003), and athlete satisfaction (Hampson & Jowett, 2014). However, the constructs of the 3+1C model have no direct influence on athlete outcomes, instead they facilitate outcomes (Vella et al., 2010). Essentially, the 3+1C model posits that high-quality coach-athlete relationships are more likely facilitate the improvement of athlete outcomes than poor-quality coach-athletes relationships. However, research considering the factors that coach's employ to effectively shape high-quality interpersonal relationships, influences, and interactions is limited (Davis, Jowett, & Lafrenière, 2013; Vella et al., 2010). In terms of effective coaching, Côté and Gilbert (2009) suggested that effective coaches use their knowledge interpersonal, intrapersonal, and professional knowledge to engage in behaviours that facilitate positive athlete outcomes of competence, confidence, connection, and character. However, we still do not have a comprehensive coach leadership definition.

To address this gap in the literature, Vella and colleagues (2010) integrated coaching effectiveness (Côté & Gilbert, 2009), transformational leadership (Loughead & Bloom, 2016), and the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2007) to form a more accurate definition of coach leadership. They defined coach leadership as a process of interpersonal influence that is reliant on the relationship between the coach and the athlete, in order to facilitate athlete outcomes of competence, confidence, connection, and character (Vella et al., 2010). Based on this definition, for a coach to manage a difficult athlete they must be able to establish interpersonal relationships where they can effectively influence the athlete to change their dysfunctional behaviours into functional behaviours. Vella, Oades, and Crowe (2013) demonstrated that coach transformational leadership behaviours and the coach-athlete relationship may work synergistically to influence athlete outcomes. Evans, Eys, and Wolf (2013) examined the ways that athletes were influenced by their teammates, through emotional, cognitive, and physical experiences. Athletes identified several factors that had interpersonal influence: *motivational influences, teamwork, social comparison*, and *social support*. Motivational influences involved teammates providing inspiration to participate, which built confidence, accountability, and self-regulation. Teamwork included athletes contributing their best effort in training and competition. Social comparison involved athletes comparing their training and development through the season with teammates, which influenced their competence. Social support included relying on teammates for help, interactions, and encouragement to foster greater enjoyment. Coaches were primarily important to employ strategies that improved the group environment through: team communication, team building, values appraisals, and the promotion of team outcomes (Evans et al., 2013). Thus, coaches may use similar strategies to individually influence each athlete. It is important to

understand that influence is essential for the coach to guide a team, because without influence there is no direction. Also, if the coach does not have a vision, the team still has no direction.

Vallée and Bloom (2005) examined consistently successful coaches and found that they exhibited four characteristics that bred a championship culture*: coaches attributes, individual growth, organizational skills*, and *vision*. The coaches' attributes indicated an ability to display favourable behaviours in stressful situations. Individual growth described coach's philosophy for athlete personal development. Organizational skills referred to the coaches' vast organizational responsibilities along with their ability to structure and create optimal training and competition environments. Lastly, the vision referred to the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs that the coach held with respect to creating a culture of excellence, and focused on athletes buying into their vision. A few years after completing this study, Vallée became the women's basketball head coach at the University of Windsor where she facilitated the turnaround of a last place team into a five-time national champion. Vallée and Bloom (2016) outlined four keys that helped facilitate this championship culture: *enacting the vision, athlete empowerment, teaching life skills,* as well as, *lifelong learning and personal reflection*. Enacting the vision involved the voicing the clear aspiration to build a championship program by setting a high standard of excellence and accountability throughout each facet of the program. The vision served the cornerstone for building the championship culture and establishing the standards of excellence, along with new team rules, clear codes of conduct, and successful mindsets. This vision was enacted through the organizational, leadership, and recruiting skills of the coach to develop the whole person. Athlete empowerment involved the coach fostering the athlete's individual growth and autonomy by transferring leadership skills through social exchanges. Vallée did this by exhibiting trust and respect for her athlete leaders in problem-solving situations to gather their perceptions of "how"

and "what" the team should do. The third key was teaching life skills such as integrity, hard work, accountability, resilience, grit, teamwork, role acceptance, and respect for authority, by focusing on development over avoiding a win-at-all costs mentality. Lastly, the fourth key was the coach commitment to lifelong learning and personal reflection, which happened as result of the motivation to obtain the knowledge to achieve program excellence through reading books, watching film, learning from other coaches, parents, and fans (Vallée & Bloom, 2016).

An important point by Vallée and Bloom (2016) was that "there are genuine exchanges between both parties where both coaches and athletes can grow professionally and personally" (p. 173). These social exchanges guide the development of a championship culture. Kim, Bloom, and Bennie (2016) suggested that coach interactions with new athletes should offer guidance and social exchanges to help build a trusting relationship. These daily interactions that the leader has with the athlete build up over time may enable coaches to have inspirational effects, which may promote athlete buy-in to the team vision (Smith et al., 2016). In the same manner as Vallée and Bloom (2016), all athletes, including difficult athletes, must buy-in to the vision of the coach to achieve success. Thus, simply managing difficult athletes may not be enough for a team to have success, but rather understanding how coaches facilitate their buy-in to the team functioning and success is important. Furthermore, Vella and colleagues (2010) have stated that within the coaching leadership literature, the present theories and models have omitted the integration of relational components of the coach-athlete relationship that examine the skills and behaviours that are necessary to maintain positive interpersonal relationships. As such, it is understood that coaching and leadership are both inherently "complex and social processes that are constituted and maintained by a set of reciprocal, interpersonal relationships and permeated by contextual constraints, based on influence used to promote the development and performance of athletes"

(Vella et al., 2010; p. 428). The leader-member exchange theory (LMX: Dansereau et al., 1975) examines the social exchange relationship between the coach (e.g., leader) and the athlete (e.g., member) on the basis of reciprocal and mutually beneficial exchanges and may bridge the research to theory gap in sport psychology.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Leadership theories have primarily focused on the characteristics and behaviours of the leader (e.g., transformational leadership), often disregarding the importance of followers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Dansereau and colleagues (1975) formed LMX theory to address how relationships between the leader and each member within a group impact overall organizational outcomes. LMX operates under the assumption that the leader has a limited amount of time, energy, and resources available to contribute to the organization, thus the dyadic relationship they form with each member is differentiated and unequal, which creates a continuum of exchanges that range from low-quality to high-quality relationships (see Appendix B).

These relationships create classifications that separate members into either an "in-group" or "out-group". The in-group is comprised of team members who have established high-quality relationships with the leader, which is defined by their engagement in closer interactions that provide trust, support, and resources beyond their defined role and can result in special benefits and opportunities (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). Conversely, members who do not achieve high-quality relationships become members of the "out-group", defined by their engagement in low-quality exchanges with the leader that involve infrequent interactions, and are characterized by low trust, low support, and fewer rewards. To achieve in-group member status, the leader and the member must develop an understanding of clear expectations based on mutual beneficial and reciprocal behaviours comprised of: *positive affect*, *mutual respect*, *trust*, and *contribution of*

effort (Schyns & Day, 2010). Fulfillment of these four dimensions signifies the establishment of a high-quality relationship between the leader and member.

The social process of developing high-quality relationships between the leader and each individual follower within organizations has led to outcomes such as improved job performance, satisfaction, commitment, role conflict, role clarity, and member competence (Gerstner & Day, 1997), and OCB's (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). For example, Ilies and colleagues (2007) conducted a meta-analysis that found a moderately strong relationship between high-quality LMX's and OCB's. These results suggest that creating high-quality exchanges within organizations may promote members to display helpful behaviours. Furthermore, LMX has been found to fully mediate the relationship between OCB's, task performance, and transformational leadership (Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005). These findings suggest that high-quality LMX relationships facilitate the impact leaders behaviours have on follower's task performance and OCB's (Wang et al., 2005), which may infer that transformational leadership may not be relevant if the leader is unable to establish high-quality LMX relationships. Thus, Wang and colleagues (2005) proposed high-quality exchanges and transformational behaviours may enhance follower's receptiveness to complete tasks that expand past their role through the process of social identification. Moreover, LMX has also demonstrated a strong relationship not only with transformational leadership, but also transactional leadership, thus supporting the LMX assumption that leader behaviours are not consistent across individuals or over time (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012).

Within sport, very few studies have explored LMX theory (e.g., Case, 1998; Cranmer 2014; Cranmer & Myers, 2014; Van Breukelen, Van Der Leeden, Wesselius, & Hoes, 2012). Cramner (2014) surveyed 216 former high school athletes to assess their LMX relationships with

coaches. The findings suggested that athlete starters often formed in-group memberships with their coach. These results indicated that athletes who experienced high-quality relationships with their coach also experienced positive athlete outcomes of increased playing time when compared to athletes with other relationships (Cranmer, 2014). Cranmer suggested these results may be due to coaches emphasizing winning, and thus placing their focus on athletes who can help them win future contests. Furthermore, Cranmer and Myers (2014) surveyed 158 athletes about LMX relationships with their coaches. The results found that athletes who had in-group relationships reported greater levels of satisfaction and communication with their coach, greater task and social cohesion, and cooperative communication with teammates, than athletes who had out-group relationships with their coach (Cranmer & Myers, 2014). These findings may be due to athletes observing teammates with high-quality coach relationships and attempting to form relationships with these teammates to increase their own standing. Cranmer's studies highlighted athletes within in-groups on teams, however it disregarded reporting about out-group members. Thus, a team's structure may be more intricate than merely containing one single overarching leader as the head coach such as the incorporation of assistant coaches, formal athlete leaders, informal athlete leaders, and peer leaders (Loughead, Hardy, & Eys, 2006) with out-groups.

To our knowledge, no study has observed how effective coaching strategies may help to manage difficult athletes, and prevent difficult athletes from impacting the team. Coaches may promote difficult athletes to change their behaviours and buy-in to the team by creating a clear vision outlined for the team to accomplish (Vallée & Bloom, 2016). Difficult athletes have been clearly observed in team structures, are present within the group dynamics, and can lead to the dysfunction of an entire team (Cope et al., 2010). Therefore, understanding potential intervention strategies to counteract their behaviour may be of critical importance in preserving a positive

team climate and culture that breeds success. One potential strategy to facilitate athlete buy-in may be the employment of leaders establishing high-quality relationships with difficult athletes based on positive affect, mutual respect, trust, and effort. According to LMX, difficult athletes are expected suffer from low-quality relationships and sit within the role-making phase of LMX continuum, where they likely do not have a clearly defined role, but an ambiguous one, which creates a disparity in their social identification of preferred or ideal roles as an athlete. Due to the lack of research within sport regarding LMX, this theory may also be relevant in understanding the effective management of difficult athletes.

Chapter 3

Method

This chapter will describe the qualitative research methods that guided the present study, beginning with the philosophical assumptions. Second, the participants and procedures of the current study will be explained. Third, the data collection and analysis sections will be provided, particularly as they relate to transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the strategies and techniques used to ensure the quality of this study will be described.

Historically, quantitative methods have been applied to sport psychology research to divide complex human behaviour into smaller, measureable components (Martens, 1987). Martens argued that sport psychology was more similar to the social sciences where researchers interpret their environment by empowering participants to openly share information about their own lived experiences, resulting in multiple subjective realities. Ultimately, Martens ideas may have produced a paradigm shift from quantitative to qualitative research within the field of sport psychology. Accordingly, the present qualitative study will aim to capture coaches' experiences with difficult athletes by identifying their strategies in the management of these individuals.

Philosophical Assumptions

Qualitative researchers are encouraged to outline their philosophical assumptions prior to describing their methodology and methods, which are also referred to as their epistemological and ontological commitments. As Daly (2007) noted, epistemology "underlies the research process" (p. 21) and holds the researcher's assumption regarding how knowledge is constructed. For Daly, epistemology lies on a continuum between objectivism (i.e., belief that one observable, measurable truth exists) and subjectivism (i.e., belief that multiple, immeasurable truths exist). The present study was guided by a social constructionism epistemology (Daly, 2007), which lies

along the continuum closer towards a subjectivist epistemology. With our social constructionist epistemology, we viewed the knowledge generated in this study as being co-constructed between the researcher and participants. Additionally, each coach's conscious reality and lived experience had distinct and unique features that differentiated them, thus we incorporated pragmatic and narrative turns to best describe the participants experiences (Clandinin, 2013).

Additionally, ontology refers to the fundamental, taken-for-granted assumptions that we create about the nature of reality and being (Ponterotto, 2005; Slife, 2004). A relational and transactional ontology guided the current study where the notion of the researcher as the expert was removed allowing both parties to learn and contribute throughout the inquiry process. This was central to the transcendental phenomenological methodology (discussed in the section directly below). That is, a relational ontology allows researchers to switch lenses during the study and adopt views of both realist (i.e., what they experienced) and relativist (i.e., how they experienced). This was important to understand both the conscious (e.g., realist) realities of the participants and the contextual (e.g., relativist) world that shaped their realities.

Methodology and Design

Qualitative research methods contain five main approaches of inquiry: case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). Each of these approaches can be used to better understand the lived human experience, however they differentiate in their data collection and data analysis processes (Creswell, 2013). In particular, phenomenologists seek to understand complex phenomena by gathering the perspectives from several individual experiences and developing a composite description that captures the essence of these combined experiences (Creswell, 2013). Difficult athletes have been found to exemplify negative behaviours that spread throughout their team (Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2010),

which presents a complex phenomenon for coaches. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to investigate expert head coaches' experiences with difficult athletes, including the strategies these coaches implemented to effectively manage these individuals. A phenomenological research design will be adopted in the current study.

Within phenomenological research, two major approaches exist: hermeneutical and transcendental phenomenology. Both approaches explore complex phenomena, however they differ in their methodological procedures, as hermeneutics is an interpretative process while transcendentalism is a more descriptive process. More specifically, hermeneutics relies on the researcher to interpret the participants experiences, whereas transcendentalism involves the researcher viewing the participants' experience "freshly, as for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34) to allow their perspectives to construct the results. This process involves the researcher laying out their own presuppositions to the reader to adopt a natural attitude and describe the phenomena as it were intended to by the participant (Embree, 2011). The current study addressed the data from a fresh perspective to allow the *essence* (e.g., meaning) of the coaches' experiences to guide the results, as they are the experts who possess the knowledge on difficult athletes. To capture the essence, we asked participants about their conscious realities of "what" they experienced, and the context of "how" they experienced this phenomenon. Furthermore, transcendental phenomenology examines the patterns of thought and behaviour of several individuals by using a *structured step-by-step* design to identify, acquire, collect, and analyze the data (Raffanti, 2008). The patterns of meaning collected are then combined into a composite description of the phenomenon that allows the reader to interpret the results for themselves rather than the researcher providing the reasoning (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology will be explained in further detail in the data collection and analysis sections.

Participants

Phenomenological research designs typically use relatively small, homogenous samples, where the participants have all shared similar experiences (Creswell, 2013; Smith, Caddick, & Williams, 2015; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Braun and Clarke (2013) suggested that an appropriate sample size should be small enough for the researcher to emphasize the lived experiences of participants, but large enough to allow the emergence of themes and identifiable patterns to arise. The recommended number of participants necessary to reach data saturation within phenomenological research designs has varied greatly (e.g., Creswell, 2013; Padgett, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1989), although Boyd (2001) noted that two to ten participants are often sufficient to reach data saturation in a phenomenological study. Specific to transcendental phenomenology, similar studies (e.g., Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Raffanti, 2008) have contained 9 and 10 participants before reaching saturation. In the current study, no new information about the phenomenon was generated after the eighth interview (i.e., data saturation). As a result, the final number of participants in this study was eight (see Table 1 Participant Demographics).

Coaches were purposively selected using criterion-based procedures to ensure homogeneity and to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The requirements for participation in the current study followed guidelines proposed by Côté, Young, North, and Duffy (2007). Côté and colleagues (2007) identified four types of coaches based on athlete characteristics and their development in the sport context, including *performance coaches for older adolescents and adults*. At this level, coaches are generally invested in their role full-time, and the athletes are capable of advancing to elite levels within the sport. Additionally, performance coaches "must have competencies to effectively train sport-specific skills, to motivate athletes, and to help athletes maximize their efforts as well as recovery, while

emphasizing on preparing athletes for numerous competitions in a specific role in one sport" (Côté et al., 2007, p. 14). Moreover, Côté and colleagues (2007) stated that coaches must possess knowledge about numerous situational contexts established through years of experience and education in order to manage a variety of issues, such as coaching a difficult athlete. The current study recruited performance coaches from major junior hockey teams participating in the Canadian Hockey League (CHL). In Canada, 4.5 million people are involved in hockey as players, coaches, officials, and volunteers (Faught et al., 2009). The CHL is recognized as a premiere development league for hockey players, leading all other mainstream leagues with 96 of 211 players (45%) drafted to the National Hockey League (NHL) in 2016. Athletes in the CHL are between 15-20 years old and have various levels of maturity. Thus, the following criteria for individuals to participate in the present study were: (a) a head coach in the CHL, active during the 2015-2016 season, (b) with 10 years of performance coaching experience (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993).

Procedure

Upon approval from the McGill University Research Ethics Board, we identified and contacted eligible participants. Specifically, coaches who met the criteria were emailed and provided with a brief overview of the present study to gain an understanding of their potential involvement (see Appendix C). Participants interested in the study received a detailed description of the data collection procedures and scheduled an interview in their geographic location with lead researcher. A consent form (see Appendix D) was provided and collected prior to the commencement of each meeting. Each interview was conducted in person and face-to-face by the lead researcher. The interviews were audio recorded and took approximately 60-120 minutes to complete. The recordings were transcribed verbatim into an electronic document

secured safely on the researcher's computer. A *pilot interview* preceded the data collection phase for the researcher to gain experience and to test the initial interview guide (Creswell, 2013). The pilot interview was video recorded, then analyzed by an individual with extensive experience in qualitative interviewing to assess the researchers effectiveness and provide minor modifications to interview style and approach. This critical evaluation allowed the lead researcher to gain insight on techniques and strategies to enhance the interview process and data collected.

Data Collection

The analysis of data in studies adopting a transcendental phenomenological approach is accomplished through a seven-step process – *the researcher's epoché, phenomenological reduction, significant statements, overarching themes, textual descriptions, structural descriptions, and synthesis* (Moustakas, 1994). The first step occurs in the data collection phase and will be described next. The subsequent six steps will be described in the data analysis phase.

Epoché. The researcher's epoché resembles bracketing and requires the researcher to identify any predispositions by exploring their consciousness through the focus, reflection, and description of their own experiences with a phenomenon. By identifying predispositions, the researcher can consciously acknowledge them so they do not interfere with the data collection process (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). This first step is conducted at the beginning of the study to shift the focus towards the views and perspectives of the participants.

I (the interviewer and lead researcher) have ten years of experience playing competitive hockey at the junior and university level, where I was fortunate to be a part of several championship teams. In that time, I held a formal leadership position over five of those seasons, where I learned some of the critical aspects in creating a championship culture. I often observed difficult athletes exhibiting several forms of detrimental behaviours that included mistreating

teammates, breaking team rules, and social loafing. If these players were managed effectively, the team was able to perform consistently at a high level, however if they were not, the impact would frequently lead to negative team outcomes. Following Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell's (2004) suggestion, I also used the reflective practices in the epoché process to articulate my biases and consciously recall several of these previous experiences from my playing career.

For example during my rookie year, I recalled a team veteran who would not put forth effort in team practices and training sessions, constantly loafing, displaying poor body language, and complaining about drills. Neither the coach nor the leadership group addressed this athlete's behaviour and it became infectious. As the season went on, the compete-level in practice faded, other players stopped training, and soon everyone was complaining. This toxic environment likely contributed to an early playoff exit by our team. Moreover, I reflected on coaching interventions I witnessed, including players being traded or deselected because of their "attitude" problems. One strategy remains ingrained in my mind over others. We were winning by a large margin late in a game when two players came to the bench and got into a heated argument. While the coaches ignored this event during the game, it was addressed postgame. The win was recognized but not celebrated, and the coach facilitated a team conversation that emphasized our team identity, conduct, and accountability. The behaviour was identified and addressed as unacceptable before it spread through the team environment.

Additionally, conducting the literature review of this present study involved learning relevant constructs and theories pertaining to difficult individuals and athletes. I acknowledge that my interpretations of the literature influenced my perceptions of difficult athletes in the team setting. This knowledge could have led to prejudgements that may have potentially shaped the findings. However, through the reflexive process of creating my epoché and bringing my

cognitions into consciousness, I have become aware of my beliefs, which allowed me to minimalize my own often taken-for-granted assumptions. Through this process, I continuously revisited my assumptions and past experiences with the intention of ensuring that the voices of my participants were heard clearly.

To conclude, the epoché illustrates some of the realities I have reflected on upon from my own personal background and experiences with difficult athletes. This practice allowed me to acknowledge any application my predispositions, biases, and judgments may have had towards the present research. Through these reflections, the awareness raised from identifying my presuppositions allowed them to enter and exit my consciousness to collect and analyze the data from a fresh perspective and openly through other perspectives.

Semi-structured interviews. As noted by Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004), the data collected in transcendental phenomenological studies often occurs through the use of interviews. According to Raffanti (2008), transcendental interviews should be "informal, flexible, and interactive" (p. 60), which is useful to facilitate and uncover more about the meanings interviewees attach to their experience (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The current study employed in-depth, semi-structured and open-ended interviews. Semi-structured interviews consist of a set of standardized questions contained within an interview guide to help direct the interview and discuss information relevant to the main research questions (Creswell, 2013; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Moreover, semi-structured interviews protect the conversation from veering off topic by providing structure, while simultaneously allowing the conversation to flow openly and allowing each coach to tell their story flexibly and in their words (Smith et al., 2015).

Interview guide. The interview guide (see Appendix E) consisted of three main sections. First, questions were asked about the participants' background and career to provide a narrative

context of the individual. Second, main questions explored each coach's experiences with difficult athletes. Further, the main questions involved the coach sharing their successful (and unsuccessful) experiences managing difficult athletes and their impact on the team, and coaching strategies and behaviours employed. Finally, the researcher concluded with summary questions that allowed the coaches to provide their thoughts on best practice techniques and strategies for how difficult athletes should be managed. The summary phase also permitted each coach the opportunity to provide any additional information they felt was necessary, had been missed, or posited any inquiries they had about the topic, the interview, and/or the process.

Elicitation methods. The difficulty of interviewing and producing meaningful, rich conversation from the participant should not be underestimated (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). As a result, to help facilitate conversations with participants, we used two *elicitation methods* in the present study: *relational mapping* and *time lining*. Relational mapping requires the interviewer to inquire about the participant's relationships (e.g., with difficult athletes) by having them draw out these associations on paper. For example, we asked each coach to draw out a diagram to explain the relationships that were important in the management of difficult athletes. This was designed to avoid ambiguous meaning for the researcher by attempting to clearly illustrate the relationships that are relevant to their experience (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Time lining was also used in the present study. Time lining involves the researcher plotting a chronological timeline to describe the order of events that took place, in order to provide a clearer understanding of when events unfolded with difficult athletes (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Participants were made aware of these elicitation methods before the interview began. The time lining process took place throughout the interview, whereas the relational map was typically constructed after the interview (with the exception of two participants who started mapping during the interview

unprompted by the interviewer). Examples of the relational map and timelines are interspersed within the results section to supplement information presented in the participants' quotes.

Data Analysis

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document and securely stored in the password-protected computer of the researcher. The names of people, places, and teams were either slightly modified or coded using a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of those mentioned during the interviews. Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for analyzing data from a transcendental phenomenological study were followed. Step one was described above (researcher's epoché). Steps two through seven are described below.

Phenomenological reduction. Each transcribed document was examined extensively to identify statements that deliver information about the participant's individual experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). From the epoché process, I actively worked to minimize my presuppositions by observing and repeatedly reviewing the interview data of each participant with an open mind. Through phenomenological reduction, I was able to sustain the awakening force of astonishment from the everyday experiences of each participant (Husserl, 1931) to reduce the interview transcripts into data extracts (e.g., *horizons).* The interviews with participants ranged from 58 to 112 minutes and combined for a total of 624 minutes of recordings. The interview transcriptions generated 169 pages and 100,732 words of text. The transcripts produced 866 data extracts that were analyzed and coded into units of meaning that formed 43 different codes. The data extracts consisted of blocks of text, such as sentences or paragraphs that represented a single concept, topic, or idea.

Significant statements. All of the data extracts that explicitly identified "what" the phenomenon was were organized into a list. Originally, 89 significant statements were identified.

Then, any repetitive or overlapping statements were removed. After extensive review for overlapping statements, 38 total significant statements were identified. No attempt was made to group these statements or order them in any way, as the remaining significant statements possessed equal value. Table 2 provides examples of some of the significant statements that were extracted (see Table 3 for a complete list of statements).

Overarching themes. The lead researcher assessed the data extracts and clustered (e.g., *horizontalization*) them into broad categories, called *themes,* to "minimally organize and describe the data in rich detail" (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 123). This began by reading, rereading, and coding each data extract, which allowed the researcher to categorize and create the themes. From the 43 codes, five overarching themes emerged. The themes that were developed from the extracts represented the common meanings of the participants' experience. Discussions about the themes occurred amongst the co-authors until no new data appeared and saturation was reached, as determined by the authors.

Textural descriptions. The textural descriptions represent the spoken words of participants within the interviews, which are pragmatically taken as facts. These facts represent their conscious realities and explain "what" each participant experienced with the phenomenon, which Husserl (1931) called "pure consciousness". These realities are considered conscious because they display the participants' constructed cognitive judgment of the phenomenon, which is separate from their subjective contexts that shape their emotions and feelings. To create the textural descriptions the significant statements, data extracts, and themes were reviewed to capture the coaches' common experiences with the phenomenon. In the results section, the composite textual descriptions have been discussed and explained using support from participants' descriptive quotes from the interview transcripts (Raffanti, 2008).

Structural descriptions. Then, the researcher reflected on the textual descriptions and interviews for further meanings from each coach's individual perspective to provide a *structural description* of "how" the phenomenon was experienced (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Structural descriptions represent the subjective and contextual world around the participants that shape their perceptions and influence how they experience the phenomenon, which is called *imaginative variation* (Moustakas, 1994). This is considered subjective because the participants' personal background, feelings, and emotions that shape their conscious realities are depicted. Thus, returning to the epoché is essential to tell each story with a natural attitude. First, an individual structural description is produced from the respective transcripts to formulate "how" each individual experienced the phenomenon, which is similar to what narrative researchers present "as expressed in the lived and told stories of individuals" (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). Second, a composite structural description is designed to capture the common context and settings participants experienced with the phenomenon. In the results section, individual structural descriptions have been produced for each participant as well as an overarching composite structural description.

Synthesis. With the composite textural (e.g., conscious) and structural (e.g., contextual) descriptions constructed and developed separately to describe common experiences. They were then *synthesized* into a composite description of the phenomenon, which is referred to as "*intuitive integration*" by Moustakas (1994). This synthesized description summarized the overall meaning the coaches attributed to the phenomenon, and was labeled the *essence of the experience* (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). In the results section, the combined textual-structural descriptions are described to provide the reader with the overall essence of the experience (Raffanti, 2008).

Quality Standards and Validity

In qualitative research, several validation measures have been proposed to produce *good* research, however scholars have yet to reach an overall consensus on a universal best practice (Smith, Sparkes, & Caddick, 2014). With no clear and concise guidelines, the scientific process must adhere to a high standard of quality (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Quality standards refer to incorporating all aspects of the study design to ensure that the appropriate measures are taken with regards to the research questions, methods, procedures, and participant selection, in order to protect against bias, predispositions, and errors (Smith et al., 2014). Precisely, qualitative designs may be influenced by the subjective experience of both the researcher and the participants, thus preserving the validity is an important and challenging process (Smith & McGannon, 2017). However, regardless of the design, the quality of the research will be enriched if the researcher displays that they are aware and mindful of the procedures that they engage in (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Thus, the researcher should minimize any misinterpretations by describing the meaning of the data as intended by each participant (Kim, Bloom, & Bennie, 2016). To do this, the lead researcher implemented several procedures to ensure a high standard of quality in this study.

Substantive contribution and width was implemented to ensure that the sample population was homogenous (Smith et al., 2014). To accomplish this, the researcher purposively recruited the participants using a specific set of criteria, which allowed the data collected to accurately represent the expert interdependent sport coach sample. Furthermore, the direct quotes of the coaches' were presented in the results section, which permitted the readers to interpret the quality of the data themselves (Kim et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2014).

Aesthetic merit and coherence was achieved by analyzing the transcripts to produce textural and structural descriptions of the data for meaning through the application of a thematic

analysis, which invited the reader to make interpretative claims (Smith et al., 2014). Furthermore in the discussion section, the perspectives, novel descriptions, and themes have been applied to previous literature and theory that are appropriate to the findings (Smith et al., 2014). This allowed the results to construct a story in a creative and meaningful representation that invites the reader to construct their own understanding (Kim et al., 2016).

Reflexivity involves the researcher consciously and critically reflecting on their own thoughts, background, and biases, to transform their subjective predispositions into opportunity, and thus enrich the *transparency* and *sincerity* of the research process (Kim et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2014). Consequently, the researcher looked reflexively upon his previous experiences, social background, assumptions, and positioning, so that his predispositions did not interfere and minimally influenced the research process (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). To provide the readers insight of these predispositions, the researcher shared a personal background section in the *researcher's epoché*, which offered the reader further context about the lead researcher's interpretations of the data. As Englander (2016) stated, "utilizing the epoché does not mean one forgets everything one previously knew to arrive at kind of blank slate; rather bracketing one's natural attitude invites a shift in attitude to look at the subject matter (i.e., the phenomenon) in a new way" (p. 4). Furthermore, reflexive journaling was used to examine their perceptions that surfaced before, during, and after the interviews, which may have biased the collections or analysis. The lead researcher accomplished this by recording inhibitions before and after each interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Chenail, 2011). The transparency in the epoché and reflexive journaling from the researcher provided open honesty to the research process.

Chapter 4

Results

The current chapter will present our findings from the face-to-face interviews that were conducted with the eight Canadian major junior ice hockey coaches. This chapter is comprised of three parts. First, textural descriptions of the coaches' experiences will be revealed to provide insights about their conscious realties, which will address "what" the participants experienced. Second, structural descriptions will be disclosed to detail participants' contextual and subjective realities, which will provide information about "how" they experienced the phenomenon. Third, a synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions will provide the essence of the participants' experience with the phenomenon. Information presented in this section will also be supplemented with data collected through the use of elicitation methods (i.e., relational mapping and time lining) and readers will be directed to corresponding appendices.

Textural Descriptions: "What" the coaches experienced

In this section, we analyzed the coaches' comments using a realist (e.g., objective) ontology and a social constructionist epistemology. This allows us to describe the conscious realities of the coaches, answering "what" they experienced in regards to the difficult athlete phenomenon. Initially, the significant statements that explicitly describe the difficult phenomenon will be presented. Then, the overarching themes depicting the common experiences of the coaches will be explained. Lastly, a composite summary of the coaches' conscious realities will be described.

Significant statements. The significant statements that provided "what" the participants described as the difficult athlete phenomenon were extracted. More specifically, this delivers the reader with direct quotations from the transcripts without interpretation from the researchers.

Overall, we identified 38 significant statements that were non-repetitive and non-overlapping. No attempt was made to group these statements or order them in any way, as we simply wanted to describe what these individuals had experienced with difficult athletes. By reading about the participant's constructed conscious descriptions of the phenomenon, we can comprehend their experience with a deeper understanding. Selected examples of significant statements are shown below (see Table 3 for a complete list of all 38 significant statements).

Table 2. Selected Significant Statements

- He is today's stereotypical difficult athlete, there is no alcohol, no drugs, no off-ice antics; he just doesn't understand everything yet. Here, there is just, "this is the way we are doing things, and everyone here is treated equally" and [name of athlete] really struggles with that.
- [Name of athlete] was out late, and after curfew and he got exposed, he got caught. So we sent him home, for seven days. And [name of athlete] was one of our best or better players at the time, and this decision wasn't very popular with the billet family, the agent or anything like that, that we would do something like that to him.
- The most challenging behaviours these players display are disrespect towards their teammates. I think it's the most detrimental to the team concepts, if a player is in a certain situation and he expresses his displeasure but he demeans his teammates at the same time then you've got big problems.
- So with [name of athlete], it was like okay, there was so many [issues], you cant even [criticize him], you just have to emphasize the good, or else he will lose all of his confidence, but then you have to pick away at it.
- The difficult athlete is more of an individual than he is a team guy, and the mistakes he makes are mistakes based on, "Well if I could have done this I might have scored", as apposed to "No, you don't try to poke a puck by a guy and keep going, just finish your check", and then finishing your check is the team concept.
- Those guys that are just dog f***ing it, those are the guys that are difficult athletes because they don't want to have to work hard. They don't want to have to do all the little extra things. They don't want to put in the work to be that player. And that to me, that's what a difficult athlete is.
- The most challenging or difficult behaviours to manage, which are more common now, are [players that have] learning difficulties with their focus and attention span. I would say that kids expectations of themselves in making the adjustment from where they came from and the environment where they came from to the expectation now of coming into a [new] team situation. I mean there are not many 16-year-old kids that come into our league now and are thrust into the same role as they were in as a minor midget if you look at it.

- [Name of athlete] was a guy that: if I walked in the room and I said red, he would say blue and he had a lot of influence on guys. Now, because he was an inner city kid, he didn't, he had never met his dad, his mom was in prison, you dealt with him a little differently than when you would deal with an upper-middle class kid from [name of city].
- I mean one of the more difficult guys I've ever coached was [name of athlete] and he was just a guy that had a terrible home life, you know. His dad always had a bad back so he didn't work. He had three brothers that [were lazy] you know. In other words he came in to the OHL as a sixth round pick and not a whole lot of good values at home to be honest and because of that I had constant challenges with him.
- Turning the athletes away from their points based performance to more of the process is a great challenge.
- You can have all of the great ideas in the world. If that leadership core is not selling what you are selling you are going to be at war everyday.

Overarching themes. The overarching themes answer "what" was experienced through the categorization of the coaches' conscious realities by describing what processes and strategies they commonly used. To produce the overarching themes, the 866 data extracts were tagged and coded. We generated 43 codes related to the coaches' insights on difficult athletes. These codes were then further grouped into five overarching themes using a thematic analysis (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2013). Themes were labeled: (a) Instilling team culture: Building a foundation, (b) Difficult athlete characteristics: Cracks in the foundation, (c) Fostering relationships: Repairing the foundation by building together, (d) Managing difficult athletes: Maintaining the foundation, and (e) Social influences and resources: Contributions of members and neighbours. In this section, we provide a brief overview of the first two themes and a more detailed explanation of the final three themes using direct quotes from the participants and the elicitation methods. We chose to highlight the last three themes for their relevance and novelty in relation to the research question of "what" coaches actively do in the management of difficult athletes.

Instilling team culture: The foundation. This theme describes the culture that the coaches created to ensure a positive team environment and to prevent the manifestation of difficult athletes. The coaches felt that in order to have team success, new athletes must be

integrated into the team culture early to prevent the incitement of any negative, disruptive behaviour. Moreover, for athletes to commit to the team culture, coaches gave reasoning for why they wanted athletes to adhere to standards of excellence. The rationale for having athletes adhere to a set of standards rather than enforcing rules was because rules acted as restrictions to the athletes, whereas standards became objectives to achieve. Furthermore, all eight coaches described teaching life skills as the foundation of their programs and athlete development.

Difficult athlete characteristics: Cracks in the foundation. This theme refers to the athlete characteristics that created issues within the team environment, which presented problems for the coaches and team culture. In particular, coaches described that characteristically, difficult athletes were highly skilled players and/or negative leaders. All eight coaches mentioned that difficult athletes may have superior skill and selfish predispositions (see Appendices K, L, & O for supporting excerpts). More specifically, the coaches felt these individuals placed personal goals ahead of team goals (see Appendices J, L, & O for supporting excerpts), which adversely impacted the team culture by creating conflict with team members and coaches. Furthermore, coaches mentioned that these skilled difficult athletes had not encountered events or challenges where they had to deal with adversity and overcome difficulties during their maturation (see Appendix L for supporting excerpt). This lack of adversity made it difficult for athletes to receive constructive criticism, and thus made them difficult to coach. Importantly, coaches deselected difficult athletes who did not have superior talents. Additionally, they noted that difficult athletes were negative leaders who possessed social influence in the team environment that enabled them to create division between athletes and coaches (See Appendix N for supporting excerpt). For these coaches, the characteristics of highly skilled players and negative leaders led to their behaviours of withholding effort, displaying negative emotions, mistreating

teammates, breaking team rules, and defying coaches, which deterred team culture and created issues for the coach.

Fostering relationships: Repairing the foundation by building together. This theme explains how the coaches established meaningful interpersonal interactions with their difficult athletes to foster relationships, which in turn would facilitate their buy-in into the team culture. Although the coaches worked to establish relationships with all of their athletes, in the remainder of this section we will specifically highlight instances where they fostered relationships with difficult athletes (See Appendices I & J for supporting excerpts).

Seven coaches mentioned the importance of getting to know the difficult athlete on a personal level to understand their reasoning for the behaviour displayed. For instance, *Ken* noted, "That's the first thing. If you don't know him, it is going to be hard to find solutions. You've got to know them because everyone is different. There are reasons for it [their difficult behaviours]". Moreover, *Scott* said that this process included "learning how to ask the right questions. If you're not getting the answers, you're not asking the right questions". Furthermore, *Rupert* said:

> I'm a big believer that coaching is about relationships and you have to get to know your players to coach them. You have to coach your team consistently, but you must have an understanding that everybody on your team is a different person. You have to get to know them well enough to know what makes them tick or not tick and how you can get the most out of every one of them.

After connecting with their difficult athletes, all eight coaches said that it was important to show that they cared for them as human beings. For example, *Ken* said, "If he knows that you care about him, and that he is important to the team, then he will fall into line quickly". This wasn't just as a hockey player or in the team environment, as *Sean* noted, "I think it's important

for the guys on the team to know that you care about them not only at the rink, but also away from the rink". Further, *Scott* believed that he "had to earn the right to push" his athletes, and that "until they see concrete examples that we [coaching staff] care about them away from the rink" he could not push them as hard as he needed to for team success. Moreover, *Donald* described that, "There aren't too many 16 or 17 year-old kids who are going to lay it out on the line until they know you care and have a really solid relationship built". Specifically, *Scott* noted that showing they cared could be as simple as interacting with difficult athletes outside the hockey environment, "Hey, lets go out for a meal together, just you and I, or come over to my house with my family". Thus, the coaches did more than just communicate to difficult athletes that they cared about them. In their experience, the coaches believed it was important to show difficult athletes through actions that they cared about them to foster the relationship.

In addition to showing athletes that they care, the eight coaches felt it was important to develop trust through their interactions with difficult athletes. For example, *Ken* noted, "If I say something and then do the opposite, I am not sending them the right message. We [the coaches] put a lot of trust in what we do and I think they [our athletes] understand that and they feel that trust". So it was important for coaches to model the behaviours they expected in order for difficult athletes to trust them. Furthermore, seven coaches stressed that mutual respect was necessary in their interactions with the difficult athlete to gain their trust. For example, *Ken* said, "I think the more respect that they feel, the more they see that we are there to help them out, it [the relationship with the difficult athlete] usually gets better". Additionally, *Roland* noted that these relationships must become reciprocal, "To avoid guys becoming negative in our room, one of the first discussions we have is "If you want respect you show respect, if you want trust you show trust, it you want loyalty you show loyalty". From the coaches' comments, trust and

respect were necessary to form relationships with the difficult athletes (See Appendices I & J for supporting excerpts). Overall, coaches felt that establishing relationships was paramount for them to have any success in reaching difficult athletes and get them to buy-in to the team culture.

Managing difficult athletes: Maintaining the foundation. This theme highlights the strategies that coaches used to manage difficult athletes on their teams. Specifically, coaches discussed the importance of identifying and dealing with their difficult athletes. They also shared successful and unsuccessful situations/interactions with difficult athletes.

All eight coaches expressed that early identification of the difficult athlete was necessary to minimalize their impact on the team environment. In particular, when asked about how he managed difficult athletes, *Scott* said, "the most important thing when you have a difficult athlete on your team is identifying them as a quickly as possible". Moreover, when probed to speak about how to identify difficult athletes, *Donald* highlighted certain behavioural indicators that he has noticed over the years:

> Recognizing signs, you know when a young man is not happy. [They] may be extra aggressive in a practice situation, or they are just [disinterested, unfocused] when you're [explaining strategy] at the board or in video. I think a lot of it is trying to identify certain situations that can become difficult.

Some of the coaches also discussed when difficult athletes were not identified early. Specifically, coaches noted that negative behaviour could become contagious and disrupt team functioning. In particular, while talking about the management of difficult athletes, *Ken* said, "you have to be consistent, and take it right from the start. If you don't take it right from the start, then it's going to get bigger". Moreover, *Ken* noted that although difficult athletes might not appear detrimental initially, they could become very disruptive and cause contagion amongst team members:

> Difficult athletes in the short-term do not make that much of a difference on a team, especially if we have a strong group. In the long-term, they can certainly have a big effect. Difficult athletes have connections and relationships on the team. […] In the long run its not only going to be one guy anymore—it will have grown to three, four, five, or six guys. Then your group is done (see Appendix O for supporting excerpts).

The eight coaches stated that once difficult athletes were identified they had to work on the problem. *Rupert* mentioned that, "to be successful as a junior hockey coach, you have to have the difficult conversations with kids that you are really not looking forward to". In addressing concerns with difficult athletes, coaches noted the importance of reflection and managing their emotions. *Scott* said that for these conversations to be productive "you have to go through all of those checks and balances before you make any rash decisions". Furthermore, *Donald* found difficult athletes responded well to less emotional responses:

> Let's identify with the player in a calm setting. Not in a verbal and emotional situation on the bench where you are going to get heated. The players don't want to be embarrassed—no one does. I think that you [communicate with them] in a very calm way, explaining the things [difficult athlete behaviours] you've seen, and then get feedback from them.

Thus, coaches found having one-on-one conversations that provided clear expectations away from the hockey rink were useful. Specifically, *Scott* noted that, *"*It's all about: clearly communicating the expectations and then reinforcing those expectations—either the good or the bad—and trying to keep them on the same path moving forward". In explaining the expectations, coaches clarified difficult athletes' role(s). For example, *Roland* stated this was "an extremely difficult challenge where you have to get players to accept the roles that you are giving them". Furthermore, *Scott* extended on this process:

> You have to convince them [difficult athletes] that this is not necessarily going to be their role or job for the rest of their junior hockey career. But, at this moment in time, this [the role] is what is needed for the group to have success.

Additionally, *Ken* emphasized the necessity for coaches to clearly articulate expectations and roles with difficult athletes:

> Quite often a player like that will not think they are doing anything wrong. He is just going to think that he is right. I think you can avoid that by having a plan. Having expectations that are clear and simple to follow, and that are fair. They also need to know that these things are not negotiable (see Appendices L & M for supporting excerpts).

If athletes defied the coach's expectations, then consequences had to be enforced. *Sean* said, "The most effective strategies for dealing with difficult athletes, while preserving the team's culture, is just explaining the expectations, the consequences, and the reinforcing them". *Ken* demonstrated this by explaining his concerns to a difficult athlete:

> I told him "I won't yell at you. I am just telling you that if you don't do that [work hard], I wont let you disturb the group. You will be out. You're going to go back home and we will just deal with the rest".

The reinforcement of consequences was necessary for coaches to demonstrate their seriousness. More specifically, *Sean* mentioned, "The worst thing we can do is to turn a blind eye. If we were to turn a blind-eye, I think you would lose credibility with the players on the team". This was important because of the intelligence of their athletes, as expressed by *Daniel*:

> The kids are so smart. Kids see favouritism. Kids see over-patience. What I mean by that is if a kid keeps screwing up, and there are no consequences, other kids on the team see

> that. So if you don't make everybody accountable the same way, they'll see it and they'll find the opportunity in that little loophole at some point.

Through these comments, coaches felt it was important to have clear expectations with difficult athletes. They also had clear and consistent consequences for those who did listen to them.

According to the coaches, managing difficult athletes did not just involve neutralizing their negative behaviours, but also facilitating their transformation as contributors to a positive team culture. Part of facilitating the transformation of the difficult athlete was to avoid placing a negative label on the individual, framing mistakes as learning opportunities, and emphasizing progress through process goals. *Roland* noted, "I think they are good kids who have been in losing situations—everyone for themselves environments—but we think that we can polish these guys up, they're not bad kids deep down". Furthermore, *Sean* said, "You never want to identify players as troublemakers or it's something that's going to become [a reality]. You don't want to brand them as a troublemaker because I find that it perpetuates the 'troublemaking', it can handicap the kid". Furthermore, *Sean* expanded on this idea when probed to provide more detail:

> I mean I have had NHL teams heading into the draft, saying, "your player's a bad kid". And I tell them "No he's not. He is actually a great kid. Where are you getting your information from?" But, they've talked to an old coach or someone has talked to them that said this kid was trouble. So, instead of looking to fix the kid's situation, they can sometimes get branded [as a difficult athlete] (See Appendix K for supporting excerpt).

Based on the coaches' comments, had they labeled athletes as "difficult", they would have biased their own observations of the player's behaviours, which could significantly impact that athlete's future. In addition to avoiding labels, coaches stressed that when difficult athletes made errors, learning from their mistakes was a critical process. In particular, *Rupert* noted, "You have to

realize that they are teenagers, and teenagers make mistakes". Additionally, while talking about managing a situation with one of his difficult athletes, *Sean* noted:

> When [name of athlete] came back, we addressed the team again and said, "[name of athlete] has a clean slate here. So, moving forward, nothing is going to be held against him. He is a good guy who has made a mistake, which happens from time to time. But, he is our teammate, we love [name of athlete]. So moving forward it's a clean slate. We are going to move forward and put that behind us". So I think it's important to tell the team that we all make mistakes (See Appendices L & M for supporting excerpts).

By framing a difficult athlete's behaviour as a learning opportunity, the coach could teach the difficult athlete *and* the other athletes on the team. In learning from their mistakes, the coaches mentioned that progress was not likely to occur immediately. Instead, transforming difficult athlete behaviour takes time, persistence, and effort. Specifically, while answering how he managed his difficult athletes, *Scott* mentioned:

> The biggest part is having patience. Understanding that, again we keep going back to the fact that it[progress] is not a linear. It's not going to be solved instantly. There is going to be progress, and then there is going to be relapses.

The coaches also described successful and unsuccessful situations when they managed difficult athletes. For example, *Rupert* described where a difficult athlete was successfully integrated into the team culture (See Appendix M for supporting excerpts):

> When I got [name of player] in grade 11, he had no high school credits. We got him through high school. We got him there because he was smart. He turned into a pretty decent hockey player. There is no doubt that environment played a huge role in

> [overcoming] his challenges. If I didn't get to know him and understand what he was up against, he would have been an easy kid to throw to the waste site at 16 [years old].

Although the coaches worked exhaustively to facilitate the commitment from difficult athletes, they were not always successful. With these unsuccessful experiences, the deselection or removal of the difficult athlete sometimes took place due to their adverse impact on team culture (See Appendices K & N for supporting excerpts). For example, *Scott* noted:

> With difficult athletes, I think you have to be realistic and honest. Unfortunately, it's [junior ice hockey] still a business. You try to get to know them as people, but when push comes to shove, you have to assess if we can improve the situation or if its only going to go South. And I think sometimes you have to make a difficult decision at that point [to remove the difficult athlete].

Overall, the coaches found that the process of managing difficult athletes required time, effort, and patience. Coaches stressed that difficult athletes must be identified early, and then their concerns had to be addressed in a constructive environment. From there, they worked with difficult athletes to facilitate their buy-in to the team culture, however coaches understood that they could not always successfully incorporate these athletes and sometimes had to remove them from the team environment.

Social influences and resources: Contributions of members and neighbours. This theme describes the social actors that coaches felt contributed to the manifestation, identification, supervision, and management of the difficult athletes. Moreover, the coaches described the impact of social influencers that were internal and external to the hockey environment.

The internal hockey social influences included assistant coaches, general managers, trainers, the athlete leadership group, and teammates. For example, *Scott* said, "I think that in

order to have a good organization your off-ice staff, your coaching staff, and your support staff have to be on the same page and have to share information freely and openly". Furthermore, when asked about the resources he has utilized, *Scott* stated his training staff often identified difficult athletes (See Appendices G & H for supporting excerpts):

> Usually I hear about difficult athletes through our trainers first. They have the pulse of the room and they hear everything. Trainers hear the unfiltered versions of stuff, so if we can get it [that information] early [we can take care of it]. Usually the trainer's room is a pretty popular spot. It becomes a de facto hangout area for the players. It's a comfort zone for the players because trainers do not have to say "no" in a negative way to the player. […] And as a result, they hear the issues way before I do. If you don't have a good relationship with your support staff, I think that's step one towards failure as a coach.

Roland also discussed the impactful role of the trainer in the management of difficult athletes:

> Trainers are the lowest paid guys but the most important guys for team success because their job for the most part is to help make the players happy. […] More importantly they sees the players character when their guards are down. [Trainers] can tell you which personalities are good, which ones need to be fixed, and which ones need to go. [Trainers] are vital, vital guys.

Based on these comments, the trainers were not only relevant to identifying difficult athletes, but also a critical resource in monitoring their buy-in to team concepts and their incorporation into the team culture. In addition to the trainer, coaches also noted the significance of the leadership group and teammates of the difficult athlete to get their message across and facilitate buy-in. Specifically, *Ken* stated, "I use the leaders as mentors—to bring in the outside guys". Moreover, *Scott* mentioned, "Your leaders normally reflect your people management effectiveness and they

embrace those values of us". Meanwhile, *Rupert* noted that the presence of difficult athletes became a teaching tool for his team's leadership group:

> I hold leadership meetings every two weeks. I take my captains and assistant captains out [for dinner]. The captains and assistant captains are like business middle managers. I'm the CEO of the company and I want to teach my leadership group that this is their team. […] I have them bring the problems they see [in the team environment] and I give them the problems we as coaches see. Then I ask, " Okay, how do we solve these problems?"

The coaches did not overlook the importance of having the leadership group (see Appendices F, J, & O for supporting excerpts). In particular, *Roland* mentioned that managing difficult athletes was not possible without the support of their athlete leaders:

> You run into obstacles of all the different and difficult athletes. You try and fix those problems the best you can. Some can be avoided or minimalized early because of a good culture and a good set of team values. You can have all of the great ideas in the world. If the leadership core is not selling what you're selling, you are going to be at war everyday.

In addition to the internal hockey social influences, coaches suggested that external hockey influences (e.g., parents, agents, billets, and affiliations such as Hockey Canada or NHL teams) were also important in facilitating the buy-in of difficult athletes. For example, *Scott* said, "Dealing with the parents, billets, and agents and trying to get them to send the same message we are sending to these kids [difficult athletes] are where it gets difficult". In particular, the coaches discussed some of the complications they have experienced with agents, *Roland* mentioned:

> The other voices influencing the [difficult] player are another great challenge for the coach. A lot of the agents, especially the medium- to low-end agents, only care about statistics. They constantly tell their players that they need numbers [good statistics] to be

> drafted in the NHL and for their career to advance. They don't care about their success as a student. They think that more ice time and offensive numbers are the keys for the player to move forward (See Appendix J for supporting excerpts).

In addition to agents, *Scott* said that parental pressures were an issue, "What happens a lot in these cases… these kids are coming in with so much freaking pressure on them. A lot of times it [the pressure they face] is parental". Furthermore, *Daniel* noted that parental involvement was a very prominent issue with difficult athletes:

> His mom and dad felt that the player was better than the opportunity I was giving him. It became very negative and counterproductive. Then it came to the point where the dad became gasoline to the issue. His dad made things worse by going on [social media] and saying "I can't believe that my kid isn't being put in the situation. I can't believe that the coach is doing this and that. He is basically an idiot". So it got worse because now the dad's involved. He was undermining everything. So I don't know what he's telling the kid. It was an awful situation (See Appendices L & N for supporting excerpts).

Based on the comments, coaches described parental involvement as being negative, whereas they spoke about the billets of difficult athletes as a positive social influence. *Daniel* noted the significance of billets, "Usually the best people to talk to are the billets. They know everything". In particular, *Ken* noted the billets importance with one of their difficult athletes, "[Name of athlete] is the kind of kid that lacks structure, and wasn't raised in a great environment. So for him, it was important to have good billets." More precisely, *Sean* summarized that:

> The billets are crucial in managing a difficult player. These relationships are important with all of our athletes, it's their home away from home, and we ask our players to follow

the billet rules, and the rules within their households (See Appendices G, H, J, & M for supporting excerpts).

Overall, the coaches utilized and exhausted every resource and communication stream available to discover the underpinnings of the difficult athletes behaviour in order to make informed decisions and deliver clear, consistent messages to the them, which was described by *Sean* as a holistic approach "It is kind of a 360-degree approach, where we have him in surrounded by people helping to bring him up".

Summary of textural descriptions. When the coaches discussed difficult athletes they used the words "cancer", "bad apple", "negative leader", "bully", "disruptive", "troublemaker", "highly skilled player" "immature", "influencer", "lone wolf", and "alienator" to consciously describe them. This demonstrates the many different conscious realities that coaches socially constructed from their experiences and in relation to the difficult athlete definition. Taken together, the coaches most commonly experienced difficult athletes who possessed powerful social influence in the form of exceptional talent or social leadership that they abused by acting negatively in the form of deviance. This occurred because difficult athletes valued individual goals over the team goals and had few experiences with adversity. Furthermore, in previous environments coaches found that authoritative figures allowed difficult athletes to display this deviant behaviour without consequences, which meant that the rules did not apply to them. In order to effectively manage these difficult athletes, coaches had to identify them early and address their concerns with emotional control. Then, they facilitated change by patiently working alongside difficult athletes to help them understand and learn from their mistakes rather than labeling the athletes difficult and not helping improve their behaviours. In order to improve the difficult athletes behaviour they used a wide array of social resources both internally and

externally associated with the team in order to make sure the messages the athlete was receiving were clear and consistent. If the athlete was unable to commit to the team culture then the coach removed him from the team. Understanding "what" the coaches experienced with the difficult athlete phenomenon is necessary before answering "how" they experienced the phenomenon.

Structural Descriptions: "How" coaches experienced difficult athletes

In this section we shifted our ontological (i.e., relativist) lens and epistemological (e.g., pragmatic) approach to view the coaches subjective and contextual world that shaped their textural descriptions. First, individual structural descriptions in the form of narratives will be explored to answer "how" each participant experienced the difficult athlete phenomenon. Then, a summary of their common subjective and contextual realities will be described.

Individual Structural Descriptions. Individual narratives were constructed for each participant to understand the context and settings in which they experienced managing difficult athletes (Moustakas, 1994). Details of their stories were modified to protect their confidentiality.

***Ken*.** Ken is former European professional hockey player who transitioned into coaching after his playing career. He obtained a physical education degree while playing NCAA hockey. He has won at every level he has coached. Ken has a stoic disposition. He does not speak extensively, but when he does, he receives the attention of everyone around him. He is very attentive and chooses his words carefully, which is reflected in his tactical coaching style. Tactically, he devises small skill execution through repetitive practice and failure experiences. To him, difficult athletes are not aware of their disruptive behaviours and thus they (sometimes inadvertently) lack respect for their teammates and coaches. With these athletes, Ken seeks to understand their behaviour and teach them how their actions influence the team dynamic. He does not set rules, but rather enforces a "set of standards" for his players, which are clearly

articulated along with the reasoning for following them. For Ken, coaching starts with developing athletes individually so the team can meet their full potential. Furthermore, he believes modeling positive interactions with his coaching staff will lead to similar positive interactions based on mutual respect among his athletes. Moreover, Ken facilitates a mentorship program with his team leaders to support their new and young players, which involves them reflecting on their experiences as a group. So, if an issue with a difficult athlete arises he facilitates his team leaders to solve the problem directly to develop their team identity and culture. If issues persist or become more serious, Ken will manage them with his coaching staff.

***Sean*.** Sean is a former major junior hockey player who entered his coaching career after playing Canadian university hockey and obtaining his history degree rather than pursuing professional hockey. He values education, which is reflected in the way he enforces academic enrolment and performance among his players. Sean is very intelligent, articulate, and calculated, combining an in-depth understanding of hockey with strong social skills. To him, difficult athletes often team break rules and have off-ice issues. However, Sean also noted these individuals often possess special talents, which is how they maintain their position on the team. With these athletes, he feels it is important to avoid labeling them as "negative". Rather, he teaches them life skills that can be learned through their mistakes in an effort to avoid recurrences. To promote athlete commitment, he creates an inclusive environment to foster relationships with athletes, which pushes them to exceed their potential. From his former mentors, he has learned to value every team member as a contributor to team success and provides clearly defined individual roles for his players. As issues arise, he prefers to address them swiftly and emphasizes that consequences must be implemented for all forms of noncompliance consistently across all team members to ensure accountability and transparency.

If necessary, Sean has engaged the player's affiliate organization (e.g., NHL or Hockey Canada) to reinforce the expectations on his team and places them with exceptional billet families.

Scott. Scott is a former major junior and Canadian university hockey player who entered the coaching stream directly after obtaining his university degree in sociology. He is well travelled, coaching at several levels, including the NHL. Scott has a teacher-oriented coaching style with an intense passion that translates into energy and excitement. Scott feels that his previous coaching mistakes and failures have been valuable learning opportunities for him to develop as a coach. To him, difficult athletes demonstrate defiance of coaches and teammates, which is often connected to off-ice issues. These athletes are difficult because of their social power, either through their high skill-level or social influence on the team, and they have the ability to persuade team members to exhibit deviant behaviour such as defying the team rules. Over time, Scott said he has learned how to effectively manage difficult athletes through both positive and negative experiences. He noted that he used to simply trade these players. However, now he attempts to identify difficult athletes early using his resources such as the team trainer, teachers, and billets. From there, he works to establish a trusting relationship with the athlete and tries to understand their situation to enhance their personal development and life skills. Lastly, Scott stresses the importance of understanding, persistence, and emotional control in daily operations to help and support these difficult athletes, taking the time necessary to gather information and turn off his "emotional tap" before intervening with them.

***Daniel*.** Daniel is a former professional hockey player who suffered a career-ending injury in his mid-twenties. He has a tremendous passion for the game, which led to his transition into coaching with little knowledge or understanding of the profession at the time. The team owner at the time was patient with Daniel and gave him autonomy to learn and tailor his

coaching style. Daniel is grateful for this, and consequentially instils autonomy in his athletes and has patience with them. Daniel has excitement and energy in interactions and approaches situations in a firm yet fair manner. Daniel views coaching from a team-building perspective and demonstrates a task orientation by emphasizing the processes necessary to have success. To him, difficult athletes are often lazy and have negative attitudes that disrupt the team environment. Moreover, Daniel has seen parents send conflicting messages to their sons over the years, which has contributed to both difficulties of the athlete and the coaching staff. With these athletes, Daniel works on the process by adapting his strategies through a "see, hear, do" approach to teach using visual, audio, and physical cues for various learners. Additionally, he provides structure, explains why their contributions are important, and promotes resilience. To build resilience, he allows players to fail, which he believes helps them to solve problems. He teaches them the process of developing skill by facilitating hard work, consistency, and extra effort. He believes failures foster athletes life skills, builds maturity, and consequently wins championships.

Patrick. Patrick is a former professional hockey player who transitioned into coaching after a lengthy playing career. He values strong work ethic and competiveness. Patrick works to adapt and adjust his coaching style to meet his players' needs. To teach his athletes, he does not overwhelm them with structure, but he encourages creativity and allows them to make mistakes, which he frames as learning opportunities. To him, difficult athletes commonly possess exceptional creative talent and high technical skill, but primarily care about their personal statistics and playing time. Patrick noted these athletes tend to have player agents and/or parents who reinforce these negative attitudes, which leads to difficulties for the coaching staff. With their outcome-orientation, Patrick feels that difficult athletes have poor practice habits and are not interested in certain aspects of the game (e.g., team defense). As a result, he provides these

athletes with clearly defined roles and expectations as a way to guide them towards process-oriented thinking. Also, he stresses the importance of a positive team culture around the athlete to facilitate their buy-in to their role and team concepts.

Donald. Donald is a former major junior player, who obtained a physical education degree while playing Canadian university hockey. Following university, he became a teacher and started coaching part-time before earning a full-time major junior coaching position. Moreover, Donald moved up to the minor professional and NHL levels before returning to major junior hockey. He has an authoritative coaching style mixed with powerful leadership qualities and has the experience to control the direction of his team without needing to delegate responsibility. Donald implements a highly structured approach for his players to help them develop routines. To him, difficult athletes are either highly-skilled and disrupt the team dynamic or believe they are highly skilled and have trouble accepting their roles on the team. In either case, he feels that these individuals often have poor decision-making habits. With role acceptance, Donald works to provide clear communication to guide difficult athletes. In particular, he will sit down with athletes individually and discuss video footage to clarify their playing roles and responsibilities. Additionally, he attempts to identify difficult athletes early and put them with exceptional billet families so they are comfortable away from the rink. Donald also stressed that these players face unique pressures and need time to be kids and enjoy typical teenage experiences away from the rink. He encourages his players to pursue and enjoy non-hockey activities in the off-season so they can become well-rounded young men. Lastly, Donald emphasizes that strong relationships are critical for developing a winning culture. As a result, he works to demonstrate trust and respect for his players through communication and facilitating a comfortable environment.

Rupert. Rupert is a former teacher and obtained a physical education and masters of education degrees. He began coaching in minor hockey, moving up through each age level of the system. His coaching style stems from his teaching background. In particular, he is a strong communicator who believes that building relationships with his players accelerates their growth and development as players and young men. He routinely delegates responsibilities to his players to facilitate leadership. Similar to a teacher learning about their incoming students before a semester, Rupert builds rapport with athletes by learning about their background (e.g., family, hometown, etc.) before they enter the dressing room. To him, difficult athletes demonstrate deviance by breaking team rules and possess social influence. They take on negative leadership roles where they undermine the coaches' influence and teaching abilities, which leads to team dysfunction. With these athletes, Rupert stresses identifying them early and working to understand reasons for their behaviour. Additionally, he feels that no two difficult athletes are equal, and thus must be dealt with differently because of their unique motivators, stressors, and coping mechanisms. Further, voicing concerns must be done quickly and openly with the player regarding the behaviour—teaching them why the behaviour is counterproductive to the team's processes and culture, and then providing them with direction for future action.

Roland. Roland completed his physical education degree while playing Canadian university hockey. Following university, he worked several years as a provincial hockey association coordinator and coached minor hockey before becoming a full-time major junior hockey coach. Roland approaches coaching with his primary goal of developing young people. He is approachable, soft-spoken, and enjoys the challenges of coaching junior hockey. Specifically, he enjoys bringing a group of young players together and teaching life skills of teamwork, work ethic, resilience, and responsibility, to help them understand what it takes to be

successful. To him, difficult athletes have high expectations from the coach and possess a high-level of skill, but are lacking in experience and character. In particular, he views difficult athletes as the team's most gifted athletes, however they have selfish qualities that can destabilize the group. More specifically, he felt that parents—particularly some of the mothers—are becoming more prominent in the lives of his players and contribute to their difficult athlete behaviour. To identify these athletes, Roland stresses utilizing contributors in the team environment such as trainers and equipment managers. Once these individuals are identified, he believes it is important to understand their issues and work with them to build character. Specifically, Roland believes it is important to provide clear communication of the athlete's roles and expectations within the team and emphasizes that the sacrifice of their individual goals for the team's goals is necessary to have team success.

Summary of the structural descriptions. The summary of the structural descriptions outlines the commonalities among participants' subjective realities (Moustakas, 1994) and answers "how" the coaches collectively experienced difficult athletes. This provides readers with information about the contextual world and settings that have influenced their experiences with difficult athletes that they may not have explicitly described as significant to their experience. Below, we provide an overview of the participants' contextual demographic information, coaching pathways, social influences on difficult athletes, and management strategies.

All coaches in the present study were over the age of 40, Caucasian, male, and were born in Canada, which undoubtedly influenced their perceptions and worldviews. The development pathways coaches followed into major junior hockey consisted of either an applied route through professional hockey as an athlete, an academic route through higher education, or a combination of both. Through their pathways, the coaches gained invaluable knowledge about teaching and

coaching through sources such as mentors, observation, or the education they received. In addition to their pathways, all of the coaches had at least 10 years of previous coaching service, which meant they had likely encountered numerous difficult athletes. Through their experience, these coaches have developed and learned over time how to best manage these difficult athletes. The coaches demonstrated an enhanced ability through to reflect and remove their emotions in high-stakes, high-pressure situations. Furthermore, the coaches noted key social influences internal and external to the team environment that were important to facilitating buy-in from the difficult athlete, which demonstrated their awareness and emotional intelligence. The coaches actively sought out these resources because they had learned that the difficult athletes needed clearly framed and consistent messages from others in order to facilitate their buy-in to the team rules and culture. Additionally, the coaches encouraged difficult athletes to reflect on their actions and behaviours that were adversely impacting the team and taught them life skills by emphasizing the processes of goal attainment. This was done in an effort to encourage introspection among their athletes and inspire them to change their behaviour on their own. Overall, the structural descriptions provide important settings and contextual information about the coaches to help understand how they learned to effectively manage difficult athletes.

Synthesis of the Textural and Structural Descriptions

The textural and structural descriptions were synthesized through intuitive reflection by the researchers to describe the whole experience. This combines all of the participants' conscious realties (i.e., the "what") with the subjective and contextual world around them (i.e., the "how"), which is called the essence of experience (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Essence of the Experience. The difficult athlete phenomenon began with an individual who: withheld effort, displayed negative emotions, mistreated teammates, defied coaches, and

broke team rules. The coaches observed that, characteristically, difficult athletes had a selfish streak and possessed social influence in the form of high skill and negative leadership. Generally, the athletes' behaviours developed from a lack of adversity and experience within the team dynamic, where they had not previously encountered a team culture that enforced accountability for their actions. Through their extensive personal development, coaches described that if the athlete behaviours were not addressed they had a significant (and negative) impact on the team culture. Moreover, from their years of previous experience coaches learned how to manage these difficult athletes, noting that concerns must be addressed in the form of clear expectations and roles to facilitate their buy-in to the team culture. Specifically, rather than labeling athletes as "difficult", the coaches learned to manage them by removing their emotion and teaching the athlete to learn from their mistakes and make progress towards implementing process goals and team oriented behaviours. To facilitate this progress, coaches utilized other social resources both internal and external to the team environment. These social resources monitored and reinforced the coaches' messages to promote the athletes transformation. Overall, if the coach was unable to reach the difficult athlete after exhausting all of their resources they felt that they must be removed from the team environment to preserve the culture of the team. The difficult athlete phenomenon captures the intelligence, awareness, and efforts of the coaches to create and maintain an inclusive, productive environment for their athletes to develop, learn, and flourish not only as athletes but also as people. The essence of the experience is commitment and by committing to each and every athlete, regardless of their background, coaches can empower their athletes to see and reach their potential to make positive changes.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate CHL head coaches' experiences with difficult athletes, including the strategies used in the effective management of these individuals. Eight highly successful coaches described their perceptions of "what" difficult athletes were to them and "how" they managed these difficult athletes. This chapter will discuss the results of this study as they pertain to previous research within sport and organizational psychology.

"What" are Difficult Athletes?

This section will attempt to answer "what" difficult athletes are based on the findings from the results and in comparison to previous literature. This section will be broken down into three sections: difficult athlete characteristics, impact of difficult athletes on teams, and social influences on difficult athletes.

Difficult athlete characteristics and behaviours. The results revealed that the CHL coaches defined difficult athletes in major junior hockey as individuals who persistently displayed behaviours such as withholding effort, possessing negative emotions, mistreating teammates, defying the coach, and/or breaking team rules that impaired group functioning. The coaches' definition of difficult athletes appears to align with previous research from both organizational (Felps, Mitchell, & Byington, 2006) and sport (Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2010) psychology. In organizational psychology, Felps and colleagues (2006) described bad apple employees as being counterproductive to the workplace and displaying "negative interpersonal behaviours, whose persistence would have important harmful effects on the dynamics, processes, and team outcomes" (p. 183). In the sport context, Cope and colleagues (2010) described cancer athlete as having "negative emotions that spread destructively

throughout a team" (p. 421). Both of these existing definitions broadly encompass the negative outcomes that may happen when an individual is disruptive in the workplace or sport setting. Results from the present study may help contribute to a more specific definition of difficult athletes by providing common characteristics of these individuals. That is, the coaches in the present study identified "negative leaders" and "negative star players" as two types of difficult athletes who can be disruptive in the team setting. The present finding may be surprising given that much of the literature in sport psychology has discussed positive aspects associated with athlete leaders and star players (Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2011).

Indeed, researchers have extensively examined athlete leadership from a positive perspective (i.e., Bucci, Bloom, Loughead, & Caron, 2012; Cotterill & Fransen, 2016; Crozier, Loughead, & Munroe-Chandler, 2013; Fransen, Vanbeselaere, De Cuyper, Vande Broek, & Boen, 2014; Price & Weiss, 2011). Loughead, Hardy, and Eys (2006) defined athlete leaders as individuals who occupy "a formal or informal role within a team, who influences a group of team members to achieve a common goal" (p. 144). Dupuis, Bloom, and Loughead (2006) found that male ice hockey athlete leaders displayed a strong work ethic, controlled their emotions, had positive attitudes, respected their teammates and coaches, and communicated effectively. Moreover, Cotterill and Fransen (2016) noted that athlete leaders are a critical component to outcomes such as satisfaction, cohesion, and team functioning. Results from the present study indicated that negative athlete leaders did the opposite within the team environment. Specifically, the coaches said that negative athlete leaders possessed social influence that often persuaded teammates to contradict their coaches' rules and expectations, which produced team-level dysfunction. Similarly, Felps and colleagues (2006) found that bad apple employees attained leadership positions within organizations and created disruptions at work. Findings from the

present study support Felps and colleagues' findings because difficult athletes may use their leadership positions to exert social influence and undermine the objectives of the coach and thus, the team culture. Therefore, our results suggest that coaches should closely monitor athletes who hold both formal and informal leadership positions on their teams because of the negative impact they can have on the cohesiveness of their group (i.e., task, social, external, and motivational).

In addition to identifying negative leaders as being difficult athletes, coaches in the present study noted that highly skilled athletes had the potential to disrupt team functioning. This finding aligns with Cope and colleagues' (2011) definition of a "star player" who is celebrated or distinguished because of their performance and/or showmanship. The key difference between Cope and colleagues' definition and results from the present study is that a "negative star player" may selfishly utilize the praise they receive to create perceptions that they are better or above their teammates, which can lead to conflict within the team environment. This result is similar to Felps and colleagues' (2006) study, which found that bad apples may gain their social power in instances when other employees are dependent on them because of their unique knowledge or skills. Additionally, if difficult athletes had lower skill, the coaches noted that they would be traded or deselected (i.e., removed) from the team. The current results add to existing literature as the coaches mentioned that the high skill level of negative star players was linked with selfish tendencies to put their individual goals above the team's goals. More specifically, the coaches believed that difficult athletes' selfish and entitled tendencies stemmed from a lack of previous experience with adversity where they had to put the team first in order to reach success. This inhibited their resilience to persevere when confronted with constructive criticism or new role assignments. Sarkar, Fletcher, and Brown (2015) interviewed 10 Olympic gold medalists from various sports to explore their experiences with adversity such as non-selection, failure

experiences, injury, and loss of a family member. The authors reported that experiences with adversity were an essential part of athletes' gold medal achievements and critical to their psychological growth and performance development. Thus, negative star players may have to endure adversity, such as failure experiences, to become more aware of their difficult behaviours and to better understand the impact that they have within the team dynamic. These findings extend this body of literature by suggesting that the difficult athletes' behaviours may stem from their lack of experience dealing with adversity. In sum, this means that star players, although highly skilled have a negative impact the team, which may arise from not having previously encountered challenges of adversity.

In sum, there appears to be a need for future research to examine the influence of negative leaders and negative star players in more depth to learn the origins of their difficult behaviours (i.e., development or experiences), their importance to the team (i.e., whether the costs of these behaviours outweigh the benefits), and the deselection process (i.e., amount of time coaches give these difficult athletes before deselecting or trading them).

The impact of difficult athletes. Along with the characteristics that difficult athletes possessed individually, the results of the current study found that difficult athletes had a significant impact on both the team environment and the coaches' time and resources.

The coaches in this study noted that difficult athletes often mistreated and disrespected their teammates. The coaches felt this created inequity and the deterioration of trust amongst teammates, which led to defensive responses and further disrupted the team culture if not addressed swiftly. Felps and colleagues (2006) found that the behaviours of difficult employees can become contagious among coworkers leading to "collateral damage" (p. 193). Moreover, Felps and colleagues posited that defensive responses from team members resulted in a "ripple

effect" whereby the individual's behaviours became acceptable to other group members through emotional contagion. In the sport context, Chan and Mallett (2011) described contagion as a dynamic process, whereby individuals become susceptible to "catching" and "feeling" emotions with those in their proximity or group. Furthermore, Thelwell, Wagstaff, Chapman, and Kenttã (2016) interviewed 12 elite sport coaches to examine how stress impacted their athletes. They found that coaches transferred their stressful emotions to athletes through contagion, which not only inhibited the athlete but also the team functioning (Thelwell, Wagstaff, Rayner, Chapman, & Barker, 2017). The findings of the current study extend previous research by demonstrating that persistent negative interactions at the dyadic-level between athlete-teammate rather than coach-athlete may generate team-level dysfunction, which is a cause for concern to high-performance teams and coaches.

In addition to disrupting the team environment, coaches noted that difficult athletes had the ability to inhibit the coach from effectively managing the group by creating conflicts. That is, difficult athletes created conflicts with coaches and teammates through disagreements and disruptions, which, when coupled with their social influence, led to other athletes having to "choose sides" between the coach and difficult athlete. These conflicts meant that the coach had to devote a large portion of their time and resources to responding to the undermining of the difficult athlete and monitoring their behaviour, which led to a struggle to juggle their other responsibilities as the coach. These findings align with previous literature on conflict in sport that suggests conflict has a negative impact on team cohesion and performance (Mellalieu, Shearer, & Shearer, 2013; Paradis, Carron, & Martin, 2014; Partridge & Knapp, 2016; Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2017). Specifically, Paradis and colleagues (2014) found that conflict stemmed from a "clash of personalities" where the coach encountered arguments about

goals and objectives for the team. Similarly, Wachsmuth and colleagues' (2017) scoping review found that conflict may lead to negative outcomes that influence intrapersonal (e.g., decreased well-being), interpersonal (e.g., decreased termination, cohesion), and performance (e.g., competition loss). The authors stressed the importance of a positive coach-athlete relationship to effectively manage team members (i.e., difficult athletes) who create these conflicts. The current study adds to previous literature by proposing that the effort spent managing difficult athletes can adversely impact the team environment by detracting from the responsibilities and roles of the coach. Moreover, this role interference may also be identified by their athletes and has the potential to undermine their credibility due to the coach's devotion of time and resources to the issues that coincide with the difficult athletes.

Overall, difficult athletes are cause for concern to coaches and the team culture because of their ability to inhibit not only proper team functioning and the coaches' responsibilities and roles. This means that efforts to identify and monitor athletes with the potential to become difficult should be put in place to protect against team-level dysfunction. Additionally, future research should seek to better understand the processes and outcomes that are associated with the difficult athlete behaviours to comprehend the overall disturbance that they generate within the teams culture through contagion and coach role interference.

Social influences of difficult athletes. The coaches noted that difficult athletes had frequent interactions with individuals in the hockey environment that influenced their communications with difficult athletes. In particular, coaches found that parents and agents were two authoritative resources that influenced the difficult athlete's attitudes and behaviours.

With regard to parental involvement, previous literature has identified the disruptive behaviours of parents with adolescent athletes (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Jowett &

Timson-Katchis, 2005; Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2010; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). In the current study, coaches reported that parents often interfered with the roles and expectations of difficult athletes, which prevented their buy-in to team concepts. In a related study, Smoll and colleagues (2011) described the coach-parent-athlete triad as the "athletic triangle" which can have negative consequences on the development of the athlete. They found that issues arose from the professionalization of amateur sport, in which parents lose sight of the educational and developmental components of sport. Furthermore, Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) interviewed five coach-athlete-parent triads and determined that parental influence had the power to "make or break" the coach-athlete relationship because they deliver information, ideas, opportunities, and social support on a regular basis. In support of this claim, the current study revealed that some parents impacted the coach-athlete relationship by providing their child with messages that conflicted with the coach's vision and philosophy. Coaches in our study said they worked to help provide direction for the parents, however sometimes parents could not agree on the difficult athlete's role on the team, at which point the interference became insurmountable. Specifically, the coaches said they approached the parents of difficult athletes in an attempt to facilitate buy-in of the roles and expectations of their son. If the parent(s) were unapproachable, then coaches ceased communicating with them. These findings are consistent with previous research that emphasized parents within the athletic triangle must be in agreement with coach's expectations (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Keegan et al., 2010; Smoll et al., 2011). Prospective studies may consider examining how coaches manage parents of adolescent athletes (i.e., their behaviours, consequences, and outcomes) and the unique contributions of the both the mother and the father in coach-athlete relationship to determine their roles (e.g., if one is more positive/negative than the other and if gender of athlete is a factor).

Along with parents, another potentially disruptive influence on the coach-athlete dyad was the agent. At the CHL level, it is common for athletes to have an agent represent them in contract negotiations with CHL teams. The prominence and role of agents has increased dramatically within both amateur and professional sport (Weiss, 1994). In the current study, coaches' felt that agents were occasionally helpful yet often had a negative effect on the athlete and the team. Additionally, coaches noted that agents did not always have the best interests of their athletes in mind and reinforced selfish behaviours by promoting outcome-oriented behaviour (i.e., producing goals and assists). To our knowledge, there is little sport research on the role of agents and their impact on athletes. However, some evidence indicates that agents may not always put the athletes needs first with problems generated from their greediness and/or incompetence, which had ability to cause stress and anxiety for the athlete (Balague, 1999; Crandall, 1981; Weiss 1994). Results from this study suggest that issues with the coach-agent-athlete relationship may arise from agents who do not have the best interests of their difficult athlete, which led to their disregard for the coach's expectations and roles for them. This may have occurred because agents believed that producing more points would improve their client's NHL draft status and ultimately earn them more money. However, the coaches in this study felt that this adversely impacted both individual-level and team-level outcomes. Therefore, it may be interesting to examine agent's influence on the coach-athlete relationship as well as individual- and team-level outcomes. Additionally, the role of the agent may be more pronounced in non-professional sport settings, such as the CHL, where they can exert greater influence over clients.

Taken together, parents and agents represented social influences that had a negative influence on the junior hockey environment. The results of present study were consistent with previous literature on the coach-athlete-parent triad (e.g., Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005)

highlighting the negative outcomes of excessive parental involvement. Indeed, we recommend that adult authority figures such as parents and agents become aware of their social influence on impressionable young athletes and the consequences it has for them. Furthermore, the findings had important implications for future exploratory research on the roles and relationships of agents in the sport context to better understand their influence on both coaches and athletes along with the sport environment.

"How" are Difficult Athletes Managed?

The current section will attempt to answer "how" coaches managed difficult athletes. This sector will be broken down into five sections: coach characteristics and behaviours, instilling team culture, fostering relationships, management strategies of the coach, and social resources of the coach.

Coach characteristics and behaviours. The results of the present study demonstrated that the CHL coaches possessed unique characteristics that allowed them to make well-educated decisions and solve problems with emotional control and precision. In particular, coaches developed these characteristics through a process of informal, experiential learning. Specifically, Nelson, Cushion, and Potrac (2006) labeled coach informal learning as "the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from daily interactions and exposure to the environment" (p. 253). Examples of informal learning include personal athletic experiences, informal mentoring, or previous coaching experiences, which differs from formal (i.e., coaching assessments) or non-formal (i.e., coaching conferences, clinics, or workshops) learning. The findings in the current study confirmed the importance of informal learning, as coaches developed their ability to manage difficult athletes through their previous experiences (both successful and unsuccessful ones).

One skill these coaches refined through their experiences was their development of emotional intelligence and awareness. In particular, the current coaches regularly engaged in reflective practices where they reviewed the effectiveness of their coaching behaviours. This process developed a heighted level of awareness that allowed them to thwart the disruptive behaviours of difficult athletes before they became detrimental to the team culture. These findings align well with previous research on the characteristics of emotional intelligence in sport (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Mallett & Lara-Berçial, 2016; Thelwell, Lane, Weston, & Greenlees, 2008). Specifically, Mallet and Lara-Berçial (2016) interviewed 14 serial winning coaches and found that technical and tactical knowledge and skills were merely not enough for coaches to become winners, but self-awareness and emotional intelligence were necessary and essential characteristics in attaining success. The authors described emotional intelligence as having an enhanced self-awareness where an individual possessed the ability to perceive, monitor, facilitate, understand, and manage the emotions of others (i.e., external) and oneself (i.e., internal; Mallet & Lara Berçial, 2016). Specifically, Mallet and Lara-Berçial noted that emotional intelligence in serial winning coaches was crucial for adapting their behaviours to each individual athlete rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach to foster relationships and manage conflicts, like the ones difficult athletes create. Furthermore, Thelwell and colleagues (2008) concluded that coaches who lacked emotional intelligence and awareness of their own emotions were unable to self-regulate in various situations, which significantly reduced their leadership effectiveness and negatively impacted their athlete's well-being.

Taken together, this study adds to the literature supporting the importance of emotional intelligence in leaders such as coaches. The results stated that coaches require emotional intelligence to lead effectively, manage conflicts, and maintain culture. Future research should

aim to identify the team-level outcomes associated with coaches who lack emotional intelligence as they may be ineffective leaders and become a detriment to the team environment along with other possible outcomes such as satisfaction, effectiveness, and well-being.

Instilling team culture. The coaches' years of experience allowed them to create a culture that did not allow difficult athletes behaviours to permeate the team environment. Specifically, coaches emphasized that having a strong and respectful team culture helped to overcome barriers that obstructed team goals, such as the presence of difficult athletes. Additionally, coaches felt it was important for first year athletes to be properly integrated into the team culture as soon as they arrived to the team to counteract difficult athlete behaviour.

The coaches in this study each developed a clear and coherent vision for their teams (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Vallée & Bloom, 2005) that instilled the values and norms that they expected from their team culture (Schroeder, 2011). It is important to note that coaches expected this standard of excellence rather than enforced rules because they felt that rules acted as restrictions, whereas expectations fostered accountability. Furthermore, the values and norms instilled by coaches were focused on the development of life skills as opposed to simply hockey skills. These findings were similar to Schein's (2004) model of organizational culture, which states that organizational leaders can implement culture development strategies by introducing clear values and building consistent norms in the workplace. Schein found these values and norms had a powerful influence on the behaviours of their employees. Schein's model consisted of three mutually interacting levels: visible artifacts (i.e., physical behaviour and verbal manifestations on a conscious level), espoused values (i.e., norms and principles of the organization that guide day-today interactions and member behaviours), and basic assumptions (i.e., taken-for-granted beliefs that govern the organization on a subconscious level). These three

levels interacted to form the culture that guided employee behaviour within an organization. The results of the current study support and extend this model to the sport context, as coaches in the present study actively worked to make sure that the basic assumptions of the team were not taken-for-granted. Coaches consistently addressed their standard of excellence to their athletes and used deviant athlete behaviours as teaching opportunities for the team. These results were consistent with Hodge, Henry, and Smith (2014) who investigated the coaches' development of a championship culture in the New Zealand All Blacks men's rugby team. In their study, Hodge and colleagues (2014) found that coaches ingrained basic assumptions within the team's core values through the motto "Better People Make Better All Blacks" to prevent the manifestation of difficult athlete behaviours. This motto may have been more impactful because the All Blacks were mature adults with families, while the athletes in this study were adolescents. Future research should further explore organizational contexts to better understand culture creation in the sport setting. Specifically, the importance of implementing, repeating, and enforcing often taken-for-granted basic assumptions and values within organizations was particularly relevant to promote a strong team culture. The similarities between business organizations and sport teams reveal how much can be gained and learned from drawing on these two unique contexts.

In addition to articulating their values and vision, coaches in this study felt it was important to instil team culture with first year athletes immediately. The coaches believed that providing first-year athletes with playing time regardless of mistakes would shorten the transition period and make them feel comfortable more quickly. This emphasis on incorporating first year athletes was important because they faced many challenges transitioning to major junior hockey, such as moving away from home, changing schools, and living with another family. Kim, Bloom, and Bennie (2016) interviewed eight Canadian university coaches' perceptions of

coaching first year athletes. The authors found that first year university athletes faced similar transition challenges including homesickness, role reduction, and confidence loss. They determined that forming early relationships with first year athletes provided a foundation for creating a positive team culture and led to better future results for these athletes and the team. The current study extends this literature by suggesting that rather than reducing roles of first year athletes and having them lose confidence, they should be provided opportunities to play and make mistakes to decrease transition time. This difference may be explained by the competitive discourse between major junior hockey and university sport, age differences, and business operations. Nonetheless, the disparity creates an opportunity for future research to examine the most effective ways to incorporate first year athletes comfortably in a major junior hockey team.

Overall, instilling a strong, positive team culture was found to be useful for the coach to indirectly manage the manifestation and prevalence of difficult athletes, however the culture was not always enough to prevent their presence. The instillation of team culture served as a defense mechanism against difficult athletes by providing them with team values and norms to follow and by immediately implanting these values into first year athletes. Potential forthcoming avenues could explore the benefits of team culture creation to establish championship enterprises because it may be as important, if not more important than the well-researched topic of leadership behaviours (cf. Fransen et al., 2014; Lara-Berćial & Mallett, 2016).

Fostering relationships. The coaches in the current study emphasized establishing high quality relationships with difficult athletes (cf. LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). More precisely, the results of the current study revealed that coaches established and fostered these relationships by trying to understand the difficult athlete, by demonstrating they cared, and by building trust and mutual respect with the difficult athlete. These findings were consistent with previous

literature pertaining to the importance of a strong coach-athlete relationship (Bennie & O'Connor, 2012; Côté, Bruner, Erickson, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2010; Jowett, 2007).

Coaches in this study tried to understand the reasons for difficult athlete behaviours rather than immediately punishing them for their poor behaviours. These coaches noted that many difficult athletes have tough backgrounds (i.e., parental pressures, parent divorces, family illness, etc.) that they felt influenced their behaviours. The coaches said they preferred to try to help these athletes rather than punish them. Bennie and O'Connor (2012) interviewed six Australian professional rugby and cricket coaches and 25 of their athletes to better understand the coach-athlete relationship. Their results indicated that regular dialogue between coach and athlete was necessary for a strong relationship. Bennie and O'Connor's findings are linked with the complementarity component of Jowett's (2007) 3+1C model, which involves responsive, relaxed, friendly interactions in the coach-athlete relationship. In the present study, coach interactions were also relaxed as they showed patience to understand their athlete's context. The findings extend the literature by suggesting that coaches be patient to understand and support difficult athletes, as there may be sensitive, unknown variables influencing their behaviours.

The coaches felt it was important to demonstrate they cared about difficult athletes by defending them in social settings, communicating with them in times of adversity, meeting with them in settings outside of the rink, and offering guidance and support. These findings were related to the commitment component of Jowett's (2007) 3+1C model that states cognitive motive to maintain a close relationship is necessary. Bennie and O'Connor (2012) found that a coach must demonstrate interest in his or her athletes to foster high quality relationships. The coaches in this study actively worked to demonstrate commitment and caring behaviours towards the difficult athlete, however the difficult athlete themselves were not always willing to

reciprocate this, which sometimes led to dysfunction in the relationship. The current study adds to previous literature by suggesting that coaches should go beyond verbal interest or commitment with difficult athletes and demonstrate caring behaviours through actions. Difficult athletes may be less inclined to trust authoritative powers (e.g., head coaches), which differs from most athletes who are open to trusting their coach through just verbal interactions.

The coaches in this study also worked to build trust and mutual respect with difficult athletes. Coaches believed that trust and mutual respect were necessary components to the relationship because they did not feel athletes would buy-in to their vision and values if they did not trust them as a leader. This finding was similar to Jowett's (2007) 3+1C concept of closeness, where the coach attempted to connect with the athlete on an emotional level through trust, liking, and respect. Bennie and O'Connor (2012) called the building of trust and respect within a coach-athlete relationship "honesty". In this study, trust and mutual respect were the most commonly used strategies by coaches in this study to reach difficult athletes.

Overall, developing a relationship with the difficult athlete was a crucial aspect necessary for the coach to get the athlete to buy-in to the team culture. To our knowledge, the investigation of this unique coach-difficult athlete relationship has not been explored previously and required understanding, caring, trust and mutual respect, all concepts that have been previous addressed within the literature (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2012: Jowett, 2007). The findings of this study combine constructs from several different models of the coach-athlete relationship and suggest incorporating the compilation of these components from current models to create one clear and conclusive definition for establishing high-quality coach-athlete relationships. Furthermore, this study extends the literature by proposing that coaches must go beyond verbalizing to athletes that they care by demonstrating that they care about them inside and outside of the sport context.

Management strategies of the coaches. Coaches also described the types of plans they implemented to facilitate the buy-in of difficult athletes. More specifically, the coaches worked to identify difficult athletes early, address concerns with difficult athletes, provide them with clear roles and expectations, enforce consequences, and transform difficult behaviours into moral behaviours. However, if coaches were unable to get the difficult athlete to buy-in to the team concept they would remove this athlete from the team environment through deselection or trade.

The coaches in this study emphasized the importance of identifying difficult athletes early to minimize their impact on the team environment. The coaches utilized their social network within the team environment (i.e., trainers, assistant coaches, athlete leaders) to identify athletes who exhibited disruptive behaviours. This finding was similar to the propositions of Felps and colleagues (2006) who highlighted that leaders must swiftly identify difficult employees so they could "quickly mobilize a response" (p. 212) to limit the negative individual and group-level outcomes of difficult employees. Future research is encouraged to explore sport settings where difficult athletes were not identified early or had not been identified to appreciate the exact impact these implications have on the team culture and environment.

After difficult athletes were identified, the coaches stated that it was important to address their concerns with them. The coaches often delegated this responsibility to the athlete leadership group. Coaches said they would only intervene if the athlete leaders were unable to effectively manage the difficult athlete on their own. These results were consistent with in-group and out-group concepts associated with leader-member exchange theory (LMX: Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX states that due to constraints of time and resources the leader's relationships with individuals in a group are differentiated and unequal, which creates the facilitation of two classes: in-groups (i.e., consistent personal interactions, more resources) and out-groups (i.e.,

periodic professional interactions, less access to resources). In this study, the athlete leaders were the in-group members and difficult athletes were usually the out-group members. The coaches empowered athlete leaders (i.e., in-group members) with the responsibility of instilling the coach's values and vision with difficult athletes. In the sport context, this finding is most relevant to Vallée and Bloom (2016) who noted that one important key to successful championship teams was the empowerment of athlete leaders. Although Vallée and Bloom did not make reference to leader-member exchange theory, they noted it was imperative that the coach empowered athlete leaders to facilitate control of the team at various times of the season. Taken together, these findings support the application LMX within sport teams and highlight the value of delegating responsibilities and empowering athletes to handle concerns within the team.

If the athlete leadership group were not successful in addressing concerns, the coach would have an individual meeting with the difficult athlete to clearly define their roles and expectations. If the coaches' expectations for the difficult athlete were not followed, then consequences had to be enforced, regardless of the status of the difficult athlete on the team (e.g., star player). In a related study, Schroeder (2011) interviewed 10 championship NCAA Division I coaches and found they had clear guidelines and consequences for negative athlete behaviour that aligned with their core philosophical and program values, which were nonnegotiable. Importantly, the consequences for noncompliance were not yelling or shaming the athlete, but rather character building exercises such as community service work or additional practice time. Findings from this study are in agreement that consequences for any behaviour deviating from the core values of the team should be implemented and framed as learning opportunities.

The coaches avoided labeling difficult athletes as troublemakers, and worked with these individuals so they could to learn from their mistakes and transform their behaviours. This

philosophy of transforming the behaviours of difficult athletes rather than punishing them aligns with the concepts of transformational leadership (Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009; Smith, Young, Figgins, & Arthur, 2017; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). In particular, Smith and colleagues (2017) conducted interviews with nine professional cricket athletes to explore the leadership behaviours of their coach and team captain. Their findings indicated that the transformational leadership behaviours most important to athletes were clear high performance expectations (buy-in), inspirational motivation (articulating a vision), individual consideration (communication adapted to each athlete), appropriate role-modeling (setting a positive example), intellectual stimulation (providing skill appropriate challenges), and fostering acceptance of group goals (promoting cooperative team culture). Similar to Smith and colleagues' findings, coaches in the present study worked to transform difficult athlete behaviours, however they integrated more interactional processes aimed at followership of these athletes. This was to provide support for these individuals so they could learn from their mistakes and challenge them through process goals. Thus, our findings indicate that transformational leadership, when applied to managing difficult athletes, may be less of a behavioural process and more interactional in gaining the followership of members through relationships to gain interpersonal influence.

Overall, the coaches in this study were able to either transform the behaviour of difficult athletes or they were unable to reach them, which led to their deselection (Neely, Dunn, McHugh, & Holt, 2016). In support of the removal process, Neely and colleagues (2016) interviewed 22 female Canadian competitive youth sport coaches to learn about the deselection process and found that the most important component outside of poor skill was the athlete's behaviour. Comparably, the coaches in our study firmly noted that if the athlete could not make an attitude adjustment over time then they had to be removed to protect the team culture. These

findings extend the application of this literature from the female to the male sport setting. However, from the results we were unable to determine how often coaches went through this removal process. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine how often coaches are faced with removing athletes from teams due to behavioural reasons. The coaches in this study determined it was essential to remove difficult athletes if they could not change their behaviour, thus it is also recommended that research investigate the deselection process and how the removal of difficult athletes influences and impacts the team environment and culture over time.

Social resources of the coach. Because the coaches felt that they had a limited amount of time and personal resources to attend to the difficult athletes, they delegated responsibilities to assistant coaches, general managers, the leadership group, team trainers, and billets, providing them with guidance to manage and solve the problem. This finding is related to the 80/20 rule (Brough, Bergmann, & Holt, 2013; Cope et al., 2010), where a leader spends 80% of their time on 20% of their members. The coaches in our study believed that involving other people in the process reduced the amount of time (80%) they had to spend dealing with difficult athletes. In particular, the coaches in this study mentored and worked with their athlete leadership group to identify and address any concerns within the team environment. This finding is similar to previous research (Bucci et al., 2012; Hodge et al., 2014) that has highlighted the importance of athlete leaders. In particular, Hodge and colleagues (2014) interviewed the two coaches of the New Zealand All-Blacks men's National rugby team and found that the team had a critical incident that involved the breaking of team standards. The coaches devised a dual management strategy that involved giving more responsibility to athlete leaders so they could take ownership of the team environment by holding all athletes accountable for their actions through building values based on athletes' wants and needs. The current results, when combined with previous

literature, suggest that it is essential to for coaches to work with athlete leaders to empower the team. Plenty of research has examined head coaches and athlete leaders separately, yet another avenue may be to observe the coaches and athlete leaders as a collaborative unit that facilitate team culture in unity and explore if their social cohesiveness determines team-level outcomes.

The coaches in this study noted that the team trainers were very useful social resources when dealing with difficult athletes. All of the current coaches had excellent relationships with their trainers, and relied on them to relay what was going on in the dressing room. Coaches also made sure to not undermine their trainers through their communication of information. Relatively minimal research has placed attention on team trainers outside of athlete injury contexts (Moulton, Molstad, & Turner, 1997; Robbins & Rosenfeld, 2001; Wiese, Weiss, & Yukelson, 1991). Specifically, Robbins and Rosenfeld (2001) assessed 35 athletes' perceptions of social support in dealing with injuries using a self-report survey and found that trainers provided injured athletes with more support than coaches. Furthermore, Wiese and colleagues (1991) surveyed 115 trainers about their use of psychological strategies to manage injured athletes and found that they facilitated athlete recovery through strong interpersonal skills and positive reinforcement. Based on these findings, trainers appear to be integral team members who provide support for athletes, which could make them feel more comfortable approaching them with issues. These results articulate a need for further inquiry into team trainers and their significance to the team environment, coaches' success, and performance outcomes.

In the current study, another critical social resource in the management of difficult athletes was the billets. Billets act as parental figures to CHL athletes by opening up their homes, cooking, cleaning, and caring for these young adolescents. Billets represent a population that is understudied within the sport context, however some research has surfaced about their role and

prevalence within the sport environment (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008; Martin, Evans, & Spink, 2016). Specifically, Bruner and colleagues (2008) examined the transition of eight ice hockey players from minor hockey (i.e., competitive sport) to junior hockey (i.e., elite sport) and found that the billets were a critical component in the adjustment of these athletes by providing social support and a family environment. Furthermore, Martin and colleagues (2016) suggested that billets acted as an important communication stream to better understand their athletes because they were close with their athlete(s). In support of this literature, coaches found billets were an important resource not only to better understand difficult athletes, but also to reiterate their messages to them.

Overall, the coach utilized and facilitated all the resources they had in connection to the difficult athlete in order to send clear, corresponding messages to the difficult athlete through a 360-degree approach (Cruickshank, Collins, & Minten, 2013). This 360-degree approach involved the coaches communicating to other important influences in the difficult athletes' social network to have them send the same messages to the athlete. The coaches emphasis on all of the other important social actors involved in the difficult athlete management sheds light on the significance of social exchanges, relationships, and social influence within the team dynamic. Future research should explore the sport team setting by including the input of other important social actors rather than just the perspectives of coaches or athletes. Therefore, these findings in combination with previous literature indicate the potential for forthcoming investigations to explore the experiences of athlete leaders, trainers, teammates, parents, billets, and/or agents with difficult athletes.

Chapter 6

Summary

Within the team sport setting, research has found the cohesion and buy-in from each individual athlete is required in order for a team to achieve success (Paradis & Loughead, 2010; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Difficult athletes typically do not buy-in to team concepts and often undermine the cohesion and proper functioning of the team (Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2010). Although the negative roles of difficult athletes have been identified as disruptive to the team, previous research on coaching difficult athletes from has received little attention. Moreover, effective coach leadership strategies and behaviours may act as a buffer against the potentially harmful effects of difficult athletes. The purpose of the current study was to explore head coaches' experiences with difficult athletes, including identifying the strategies these coaches implemented to effectively manage these individuals.

Upon receiving ethical approval from the McGill University Research Ethics Board, eight expert head coaches from major junior hockey in Canada (CHL) were recruited to participate in this study. The coaches averaged 21 years of experience, ranging from 11 to 31 years at the junior level or higher. Data collection involved semi-structured and opened-ended interviews with each coach, which averaged 78 minutes. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim before being analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for phenomenological analysis, which involved three phases: (a) generating themes, (b) composing individual narratives for each coach, and (c) generating the overall essence of the experience.

Specific to the themes, the analysis yielded five distinct themes representing the coaches' conscious realities (i.e., "what" are difficult athletes). *Difficult athlete characteristics* referred to the coaches' definition of difficult athletes. *Instilling team culture* pertained to the environment

the coaches created to prevent difficult athlete behaviours from occurring. *Fostering relationships* discussed the types of interactions coaches' had with difficult athletes. *Difficult athlete management* reviewed the strategies coaches used to facilitate difficult athlete buy-in. *Social resources and influences* identified the people involved in the manifestation, persistence, and management of difficult athletes.

Individual narratives were constructed for each of the eight coaches to better understand their subjective and contextual realities (i.e., "how" they managed difficult athletes). While the narratives demonstrated the unique coaching pathways and philosophies of each coach, it also identified some common characteristics among them. For example, the coaches were highly aware of the team environment and it became evident that emotional intelligence was important in the early identification of difficult athletes. Additionally, coaches described the importance of emotional control, problem-solving, and self-reflection skills that allowed them to address concerns calmly yet firmly to try to find appropriate solutions.

The themes and individual narratives were synthesized to construct the "essence" of coaches' experience with difficult athletes. Overall, the coaches' were committed to the development of all their athletes, and they used all available resources to facilitate the appropriate behaviour and buy-in of difficult athletes. The coaches said they were focused on the difficult athletes' development as a player *and* as a person, and their goal was to reach each difficult athlete and transform their negative behaviours into positive ones.

Conclusions

"What" Difficult Athletes Do.

- Coaches defined difficult athlete behaviours as an individual withholding effort, possessing negative emotions, mistreating teammates, defying the coach, and/or breaking team rules.

- Difficult athletes impeded the proper functioning of the team through contagion, by creating conflict and breaking down trust within the team, which inhibited the team culture and environment.
- Difficult athletes undermined the coaches' communication to the team.
- Difficult athletes required a considerable amount of time and resources for coaches to manage them, which took away from the other tasks involved in their job.
- Difficult athletes often had people in their social network that either had authoritative power and/or the ability to influence their behaviours, such as parents and agents.

"How" the Coaches Managed Difficult Athletes.

- Coaches appeared to have heightened awareness and emotional intelligence, which was developed through years of experience and informal learning opportunities.
- Coaches developed strong and respectful team cultures as a mechanism to try to prevent the manifestation of difficult athletes in their team environment.
- To build strong culture, coaches coupled their team vision with strong values and norms to create a standard of excellence, which was instilled within each athlete upon their arrival on to the team.
- The coaches fostered high-quality relationships with difficult athletes, by demonstrating they cared about them as a person.
- Coaches facilitated the buy-in of difficult athletes by identifying them early, addressing concerns swiftly, clarifying expectations and roles, enforcing consequences, and transforming negative behaviours into positive ones.
- The coaches noted that they could not manage difficult athletes without support from other coaches, athlete leaders, trainers, and billets.

- When coaches were not able to successfully transform the difficult athletes behaviours, they felt it was necessary to remove them from the team environment (i.e., trade, deselection) in order to protect the team culture.

Essence of the Experience.

- The coaches were committed to athlete development and expended all of their resources in order to facilitate the growth of their difficult athletes.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of present study had implications to existing theory from both sport (Jowett, 2007; Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009) and organizational (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Schein, 2004) psychology. In particular, these results were related to leader-member exchange theory (LMX: Dansereau et al., 1975), which comes from the organizational literature. LMX posits that leaders (i.e., coaches) require the assistance of in-group members (i.e., athlete leaders) to manage the group environment, including the buy-in of out-group members (i.e., difficult athletes). Indeed, the coaches in this study felt that their athlete leaders played in pivotal role in the management and transformation of difficult athlete behaviours. Given that this study was not developed using LMX, future research might consider using LMX to better understand team dynamics, including coach-athlete relationships and behaviours.

Methodological Implications

The current study used a transcendental phenomenological approach to study difficult athletes in sport. Transcendental phenomenology has commonly been used in other research domains such as education and leadership (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Raffanti, 2008). However, transcendental phenomenology has been overlooked in coaching research, which is somewhat surprising given the many similarities between leaders, teachers, and coaches.

Transcendental phenomenology offers a highly structured approach to analyzing data, which is particularly well suited for master's and doctorate level researchers. With the coaches being the experts and knowledge holders, we wanted to better understand their realities and experiences with difficult athletes. To do this, we followed Moustakas' (1994) guidelines to determine "what" coaches experienced the difficult athlete phenomenon and "how" they managed these individuals. Overall, this approach provides coaching science researchers with a methodology to gather detailed descriptions of aspects of the sport environment, which may reveal insights that can inform future research and intervention.

Practical Applications

A number of practical applications can be gleaned from the results of this study. First, these findings may be of interest to coach education certification programs, such as the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) in Canada, the Coach Education Program (CEP) in the United States, as well as the United Kingdom Coaching Certification (UKCC). Specifically, the results of this study could inform coaches how to effectively manage difficult athletes given that they will likely encounter them throughout their careers. Second, the results highlight the importance of coaches developing their emotional intelligence to recognize and then manage difficult athletes – sooner rather than later. Third, these results point to the importance of coaches reaching out to athlete leaders, teammates, trainers, and billets to help manage difficult athletes.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the current study provided a number of novel insights into coaching effectiveness and difficult athlete management, several limitations should be discussed. First, coaches in this study were all CHL ice hockey coaches. The CHL is a unique sport setting for both athletes and coaches because it gathers a great deal of attention from fans and media across

North America, particularly for an amateur sport. As such, the results may not be as applicable to other sport settings such as youth, masters, and university levels, which do not receive the same attention or financial resources. Second, the coaches in this study were all men who coached male athletes 16-20 years of age. There currently are no any female coaches or athletes in the CHL, whereas other ice hockey leagues, such as female university and professional, have both male and female coaches. Thus, exploring the difficult athlete phenomenon across different sport contexts with coaches of both genders would improve our understanding of this topic. Third, all of the coaches in this study had over 10 years of coaching experience at the junior level. The coaches noted that their strategies and approaches with difficult athletes evolved over time. Thus, this sample may not be representative of all CHL coaches, especially those with less experience. Future studies may consider investigating how less experienced CHL coaches manage difficult athletes. Fourth, the hockey environment may have some unique features due to its structure, size, behaviours, and dynamic nature of the game. As a result, it would be interesting to learn from coaches working in other sport contexts such as, basketball, baseball, soccer, football, or rugby. Fifth, these findings were also limited to the perspectives of head coaches and therefore do not represent the perspectives of assistant coaches or others involved in hockey operations. Future studies should investigate the role and management of difficult athletes from assistant coaches, trainers, parents, agents, teammates, athlete leaders, or even the difficult athletes themselves. By gaining different perspectives a broader understanding of difficult athletes can be developed in order to better manage and transform difficult athlete behaviours.

"*The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy*" – Martin Luther King, Jr.

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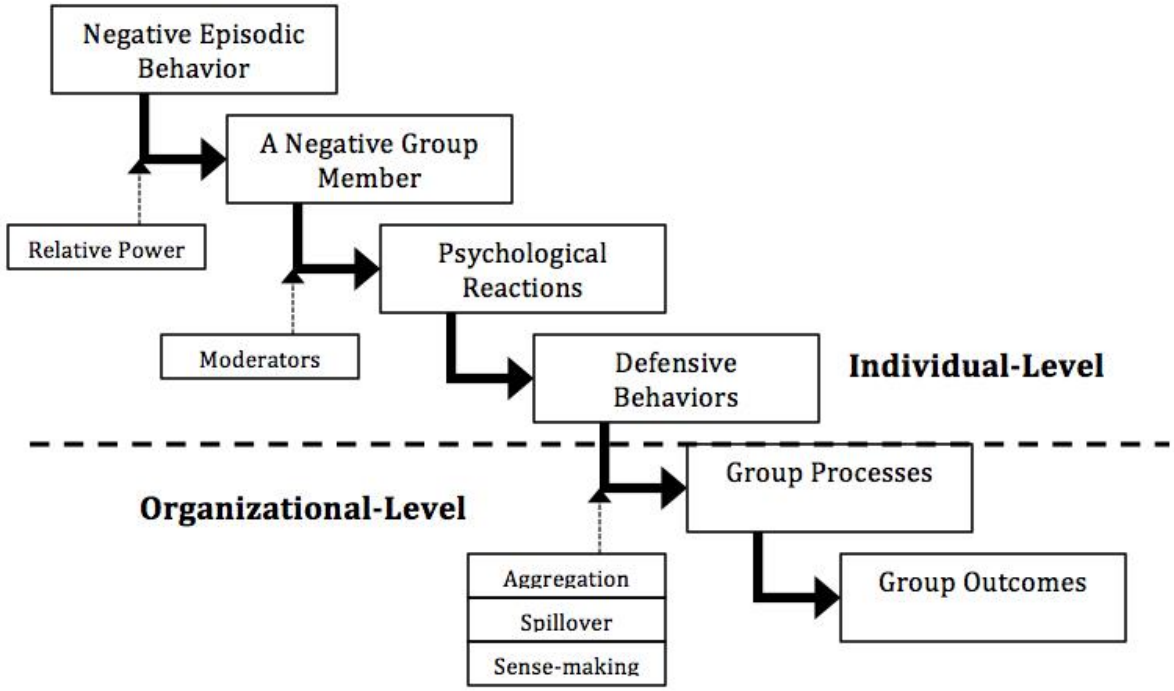
Appendices

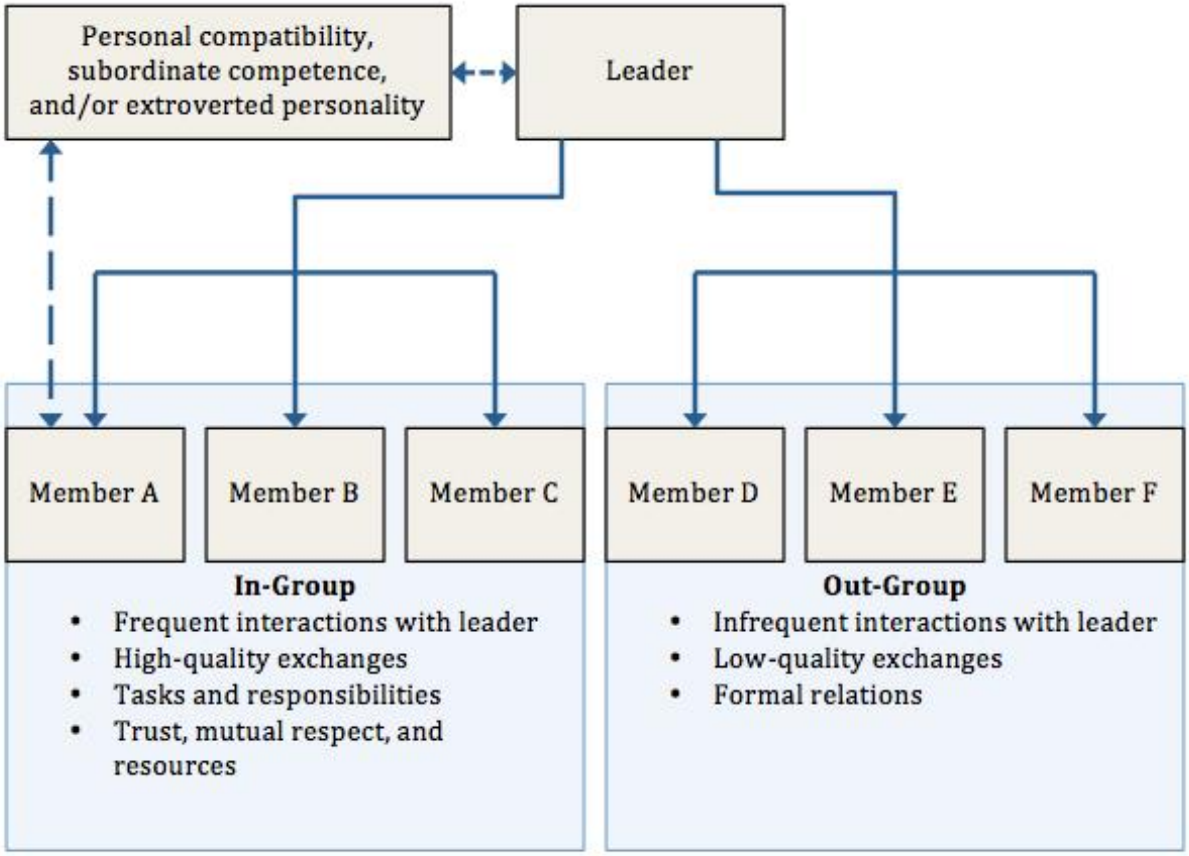
Appendix A: The Bad Apple Phenomenon



Adapted from:

Felps, W., Mitchell, T. R., & Byington, E. (2006). How, when, and why bad apples spoil the barrel: Negative group members and dysfunctional groups. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *27*, 175-222.

Appendix B: Leader-Member Exchange Theory



Adapted from:

Robbins, S, P., Judge, T, A., Campbell, T, C. (2010). *Organizational behavior, 14E*. New York: Pearson Education.

Appendix C: Recruitment Script

Dear _____,

My name is Liam Heelis and I am currently a Master of Arts student at McGill University working towards a degree in sport psychology under the supervision of Dr. Gordon Bloom. We are contacting you based on a set of criteria highlighting your success and achievement within the major junior coaching domain. We would like to invite you to participate in our study exploring effective coaching practices in the management of difficult athletes. Difficult athletes are operationally defined as individuals that persistently display negative behaviours that can spread destructively through the entire team. The behaviours difficult athletes display include: withholding effort, expressing negative emotions and moods, mistreating teammates, defying coaches, and breaking team rules.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in a face-to-face interview that would last approximately 60-120 minutes in a location of your choice. If more information is required, a follow up interview may be requested. The interview questions would be focused on your experiences managing athletes who typically withhold effort, demonstrate negative emotions, and break team rules. All of the information provided will be confidential, with the responses analyzed strictly by my supervisor Dr. Gordon Bloom and myself. The results gathered will be sent back to you after the interview to certify their accuracy and to allow you the opportunity to modify any of your answers. Furthermore, the findings will provide suggestions for other coaches to help them effectively manage athletes on their teams. 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.

The study has been reviewed by the McGill University Ethics Board (REB # _____). If you have any questions or concerns regarding ethics, please feel free to contact deanna.collin@mcgill.ca or by phone at 514-398-2267. If you have any questions regarding the nature of the study itself, feel free to contact my supervisor or myself using the information at the bottom of the page. Finally, if you are interested in learning more about the research conducted in our Sport Psychology Lab at McGill University, please visit our website for more information: http://sportpsych.mcgill.ca/gpsp.html.

Thank you for your consideration in taking part in our study. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Liam Heelis

Liam Heelis, B.Sc.
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Gordon A. Bloom, Ph.D.
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gordon.bloom@mcgill.ca

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

This study is being commenced in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts for Liam Heelis, a current graduate student in sport psychology in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at McGill University. You are invited to participate in the research study entitled: "Coaching Strategies in the Management of Difficult Athletes". If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in one 60-120 minute, audio recorded interview, without compensation. If more information is required, an additional follow-up interview may be requested either in person, over the telephone, or virtually over Skype. During the interview you will be asked questions regarding current and ideal coaching behaviours and strategies in the management of athletes displaying behaviour detrimental to the proper functioning of the team. An example of these behaviours includes withholding effort, negative emotions, breaking team rules, and/or mistreating teammates. 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.

At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions or make any additional comments that were not discussed throughout the interview. You will receive a typed transcript of the interview, which you may edit at your own discretion. You will also receive a copy of the results and conclusions of the study prior to publication. Your identity will **remain confidential at all times** and the primary researcher, Liam Heelis, and the faculty supervisor, Dr. Gordon Bloom, will be the only individuals with access to a copy of the responses. All of the data, including the audio-recorded copy of the interview and the consent form, will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer for five years. Any paper copies of notes will be converted into digital files and destroyed at the end of the study. The information gathered from the study will be used solely for conference presentations and journal article publications and your confidentiality will be maintained and respected throughout the entirety of the process. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory, therefore you have the ability to refuse to answer any questions without penalty and if you choose to withdraw from the study, all information attained up until that point will be destroyed.**

After reading the above statements you can now provide consent to voluntarily agree to participate in this research study based on the terms outlined in this consent form. You will be provided with a signed copy of this consent form. If you have any addition questions regarding ethical considerations including your rights and welfare as a participant in a research study, please feel free to contact lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca or at 514-398-6831. Please sign below if you agree to participate:

_____	_____
Signature	Date
_____	_____
Researcher's Signature	Date

Liam Heelis, B.Sc.
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Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Pre-Interview Routine
Introduction
Consent Form
Relational Map & Time lining

Opening Questions

1. Could you briefly describe your hockey coaching career?
    - Levels of competition.
    - Accomplishments.

2. Describe how you adapt your coaching style to meet the needs of each individual athlete?
    - Begin constructing relational map and time lining with the coach.

Key Questions

"What Questions"

3. What are your thoughts about coaching difficult athletes?
    - Personal experiences (e.g., successful, unsuccessful).
    - Impact on team environment (e.g., athletes, athlete leaders, coaches).
    - Effect on team outcomes (e.g., performance, satisfaction)

"How Questions"

4. Talk to me about how you have managed these difficult athletes?
    - Perceptions of most challenging behaviours.
    - Strategies.
    - Resources used (e.g., athlete leaders, assistant coaches, mentors, books).

Summary Questions

5. What do you think are the most effective strategies for dealing with difficult athletes, while still preserving a positive team culture?

Concluding Questions

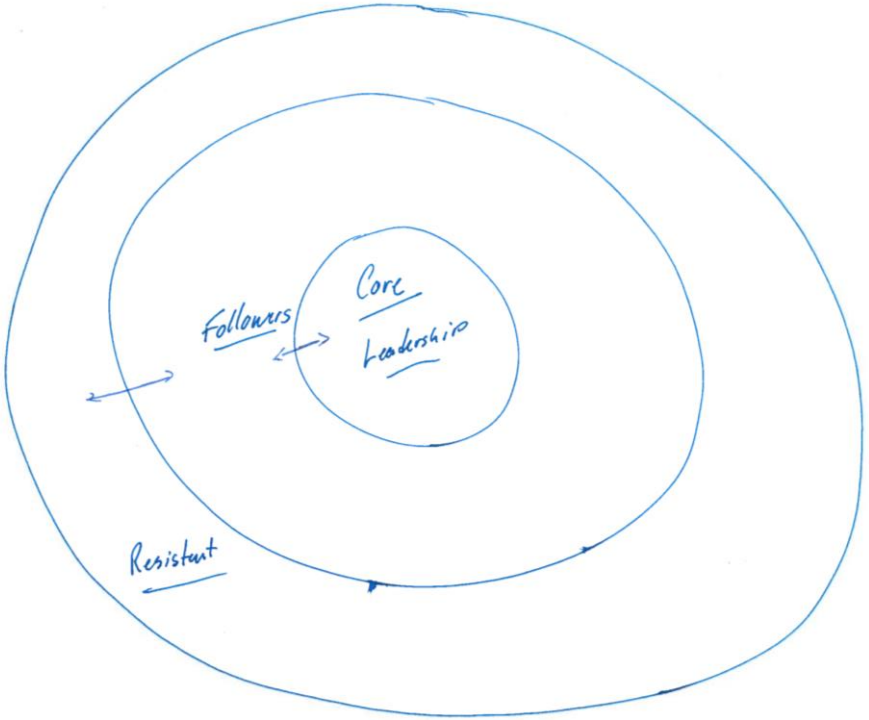
6. Is there anything else you would like to add to today's discussion?

7. Do you have any final questions or concern

Appendix F: Ken's Relational Map

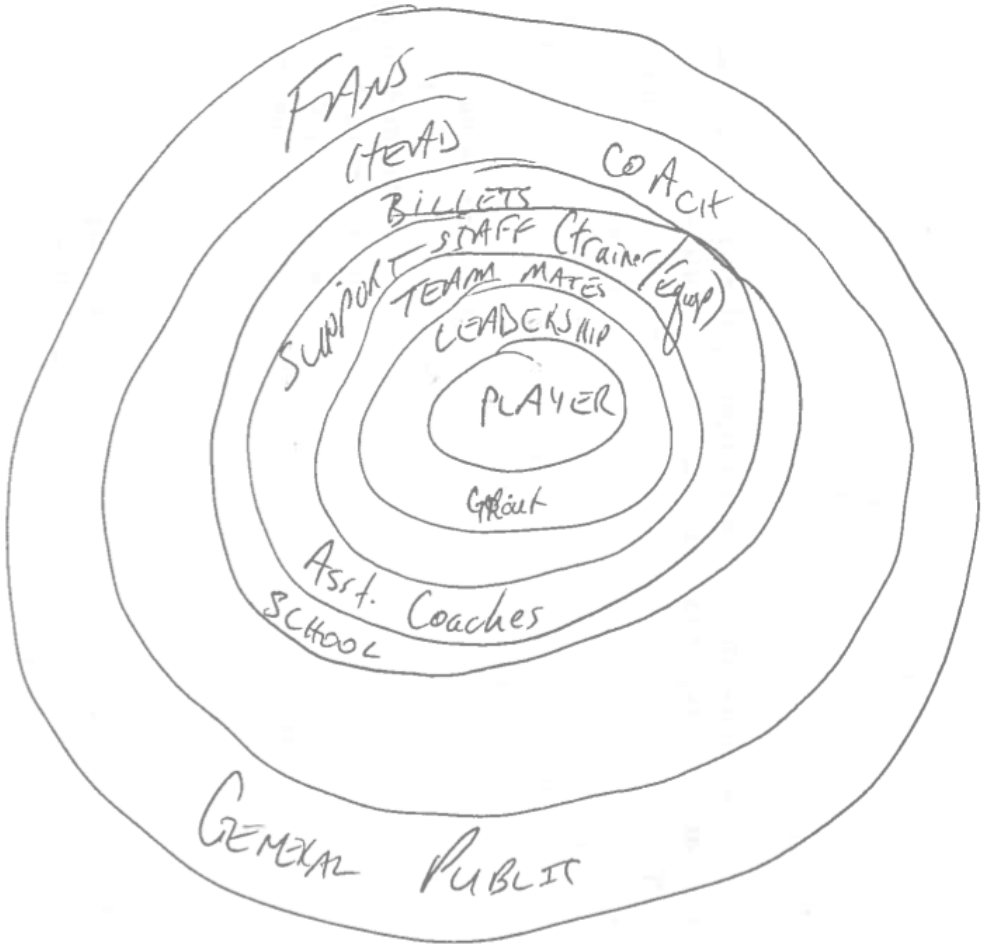
Note For All Relational Maps: The relational maps were constructed by each coach participant with the instruction to draw a diagram signifying the relationships that the coach felt were important or influential in the management of difficult athletes, no further direction was given. The coaches drew up their own diagrams with different ways of signifying their difficult athlete relationships. Additionally, coaches drew unprompted diagrams, which have been added to these appendices below under titles separate from "relational maps". Some diagrams were omitted due to their overlapping nature with others or lack of relevance to the study.

Ken: I always look at the group like this [begins drawing diagram]. You have the leaders: the guys that you know are all-in. Then, there is the middle-layer of guys [the followers], which are going to go either this way or that way. And then you have the guys who are on the outside there [the resistant], they're difficult ones. You need to be bringing those guys [the resistant] in to the middle [to become followers] using those guys in the middle [the core leadership and other followers]. So some years depending on the group, I will take my guys in the middle [the leaders], and I will give them guys that are on the outside [the resistant] and go, "Hey, you take care of that guy, you bring him in, that's your job".



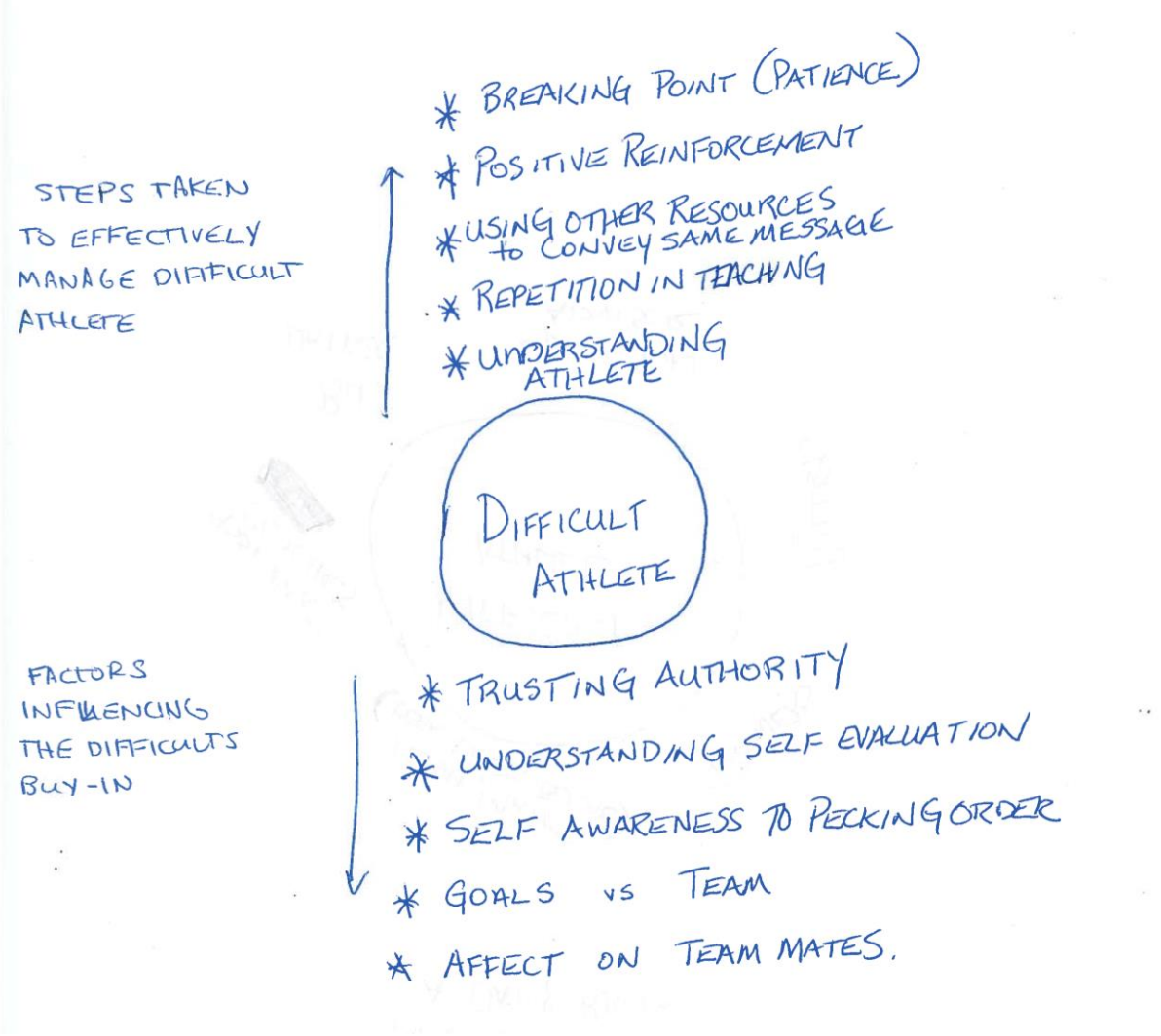
Appendix G: Scott's Relational Map

Scott: You know, and obviously once you get to your core and you peel off the layers and you get to the core, you've got your support staff, and you've got your trainer, your equipment guy, if you've got a regular bus driver, and anyone else who sees them on a regular basis around the group. You've got your assistant coaches who fall into that bracket, and then you've got your team. You know, you've got your core and the individual at the center, and then you've got your leadership core immediately around them, then the younger guys on the next layer. So if there is an issue it usually works that way.

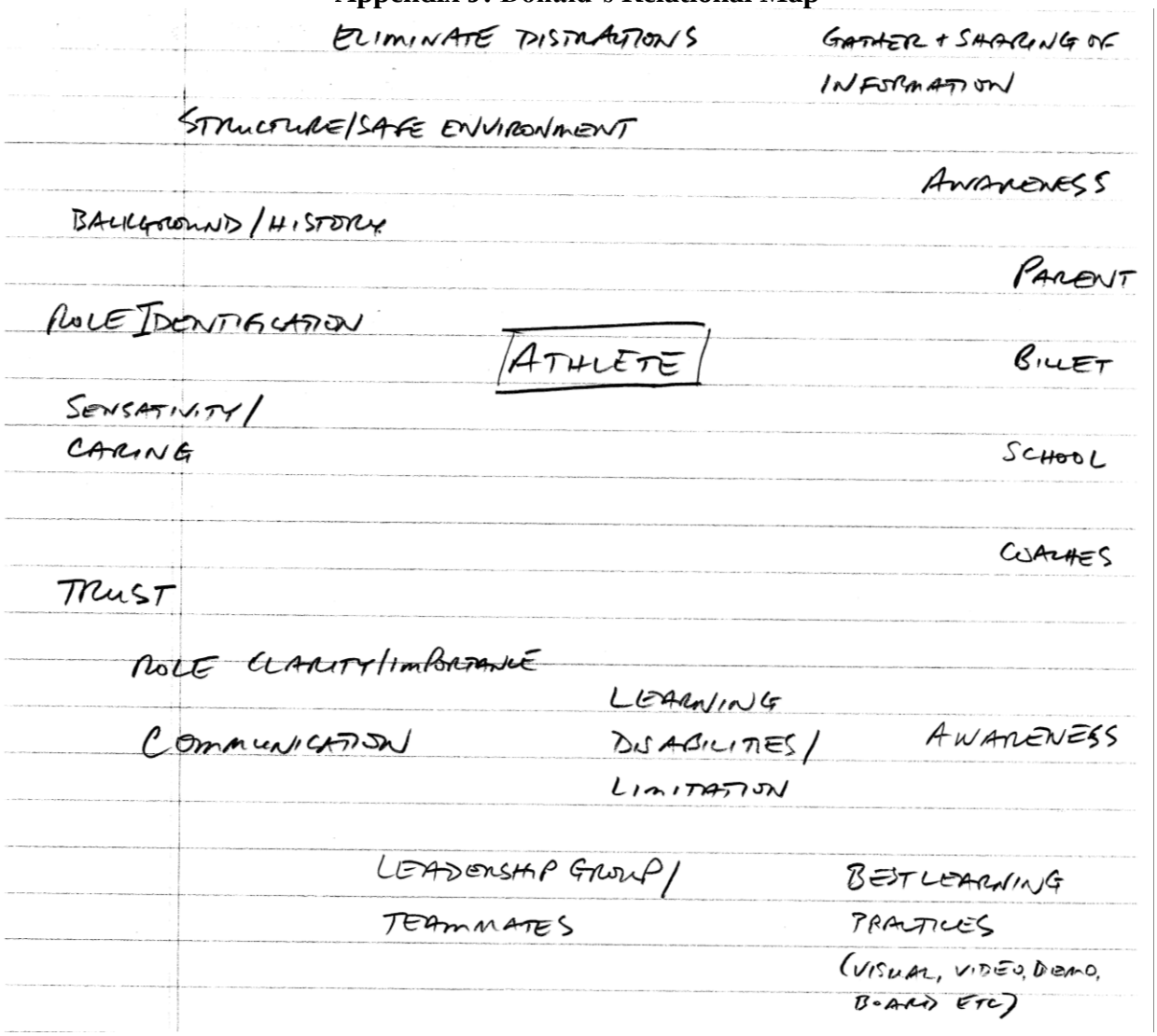


Appendix H: Sean's Relational Map

Appendix I: Daniel's Relational Map



Appendix J: Donald's Relational Map



Appendix K: Jared Rathbone Narrative Timeline

Note For All Narrative Timelines: To structure the difficult athlete narratives in a chronological timeline the subheading of: Background, Actions, Reactions, Consequences, and Outcomes have been used. Text from the coaches interview data was written using "*italics".* The researchers narration to clarify the coach descriptions is "not italicized". The names of the individuals and locations have been edited or removed to protect their confidentiality. The specific coach in the narrative has been withdrawn because the purpose of this section was to depict the narrative chronological experience of managing the difficult athlete rather than the coach's individual experience. Timelines of difficult athletes that were not applicable to the results were omitted.

TIMELINE	**Jared Rathbone**
Background: Behaviours difficult athlete displayed and their previous context.	*I had a difficult player case last year when I came to [name of city] before I had even started. First, Jared is a different cat. We've all been around different guys, he is very intelligent, but didn't mind straying. He went to the beat of his own drum. My first year he won the scoring title, second year he came back very [arrogant].* The coach believed Jared came back his second season with a bad attitude. *I think as a young guy I took everything personally. So if a kid was screwing up or acting up, whether it was questioning me, I never expressed that, but that's the mental Olympics going on in your head.* This difficult athlete came early in the coach's career, and he felt his inexperience was a factor. *Rather than delving deeper, I just took it on the surface as the hockey. On the ice, Jared was head and shoulders our most talented player, he had won the scoring title the year before and he had also won the plus-minus. When he put his mind to it, when he applied himself.* Jared was highly skilled, but reaching him on a personal level was tough for the coach. *Jared is not a leader, Jared is not a guy that would ever have ever had a letter. He didn't live right, he didn't train right, shit he didn't [do most things right]…now all of a sudden he wouldn't play right.*
Actions: The difficult athlete actions or events that took place (e.g., broke curfew).	*I will never forget our first team meeting. We were in a board room meeting at the hotel and Jared walks in with the body of a 45 year old guy, non-athlete, and he's got a bag of McDonalds, and I turn to the guy next to me and go "What the fuck!"* Jared displayed behaviours that were atypical for an athlete in the CHL. *None of our boys said anything but you just learn to live with him. He took pride in the fact that he never worked out, never did anything, and he was top 10 in the league. The following year we didn't have quite the supporting cast, and now he [Jared] started believing well fuck, all of a sudden he didn't like his line mates, he didn't like this, he didn't like that, stuff that hadn't existed last season.* Jared created conflict in the team environment. *Jared just alienated himself and pushed his teammates off to his side and created almost an elitist attitude that nobody else shared. It became worse when he had adversity, when things weren't going well, instead of helping the group as your best player. He became "well fuck you I'm doing my job your not doing yours".* His mistreatment of teammates broke down the team's culture. *It just created a huge divide in the room. His negative behaviour affected everyone in the room, and they started to react defensively. It created a split in the room, he became just a lone wolf, where he just wanted to do his own thing, and the rest of the group felt that he was a side from them.*
Reactions: How coach responded using his environment (e.g., held a meeting).	The team was struggling midseason and the coach was looking for answers to why they were having such difficulties. *With Jared the tipping point for me is: we had these midseason meetings, and I ask every player to give me a specific problem with our team. We were in a slump, hadn't been doing well for the better part of 20 games and 95 percent of the players identified Jared as their number one problem. Specifically, by name without much prodding, "Give me one reason, one specific problem with this team, worded that way". It could have been "Hey our systems, hey our schedule, could have been this, could have been that, but it was Jared".* The coach asked his athletes what was wrong with their team environment and outcomes. *Jared spit in the wind in a lot of different areas of his life. But again, I listened too much to a group of teenagers rather than adults. So I let the teenagers sway my decision when it should have been "Okay that's their perspective, there is validity to it". But we also [need to] know, why is he acting like this, I don't think we did enough digging as to the why.* The coach learned that maybe Jared was not the source of their issues but rather became someone to place the blame on and did not inquire enough into Jared's struggles in hindsight.
Consequences & Outcomes: What coach implemented (e.g., sent athlete home).	*Jared Rathbone was a difficult athlete. He is someone we ended up trading. With Jared, we just went fuck off Jared, enough is enough, and we are just going to get rid of you. We traded him for [athlete name] who made a big splash but I don't think we did him any good to him as a hockey player or as a person.* The coach felt he could have done more to help support the athlete. *The reason we made the move there is, cause we weren't sure there was enough time to bring that around. So that became an emergence of "Hey, its still a business versus there was other issues".* In this instance, the business of the sport and repairing their team culture involved trading the difficult athlete.

Appendix L: Brian Kelly Narrative Timeline

TIMELINE	Brian Kelly
Background: Behaviours difficult athlete displayed and their previous context.	*We've got an athlete playing for us now, Brian Kelly, who is your stereotypical difficult athlete. There is no alcohol, no drugs, no off-ice antics. He just doesn't understand everything yet. So* Brian *is still working through it, he is starting to understand what the expectations are and it has him taken a little bit longer than most, and now he is drafted to the NHL. Brian is a player that has moved around a lot on minor hockey teams, but he has a tremendous, tremendous amount of skill. So he hadn't faced much adversity in his game before coming to play in the CHL. The Brian Kelly example I am using here, he has never really had to deal with any real type of adversity. So when there was adversity with the team, he was allowed to change teams and his parents facilitated that. If he had problems with a teammate he changes teams, and they would facilitate that. It's an example of a kid who has never been told "no". So he has never had to deal with that on his own, so that's a whole set complex. Here, it is just, this is the way we are doing things, and everyone here is treated equally and Brian really struggles with that.*
Actions: The difficult athlete actions or events that took place (e.g., broke curfew).	*Brian will typically display behaviours where we have to communicate with him and address the instance and why it's not appropriate. I will give you an example of something as simple as going to school. So for fifteen years here, we have had a rule that if you miss class then you don't play. Sean continuously misses class, so he continuously misses the opportunity to play. About four or five times a year, he will skip school and then we will sit him out on the weekend. Brian really believes that the rules will not be applied to him, which is because of his pedigree. It is important to make Brian and each player accountable for their actions.*
Reactions: How coach responded using his environment (e.g., held a meeting).	*We are working hand in hand with the NHL team to get Brian where he needs to be. But, he requires a lot of maintenance on a daily basis. He is not a bad kid. He is just different than all of our other players. When we reinforce the rules and let him know that its mandatory that you go to school and you are going to pass your courses.* The coach provides clear expectations. *If "I want to traded" is his response, we tell him, "No, we think you are a great player and we are not going to trade you, we are going to work with you".* To make the message clear, the coach uses Brian's NHL affiliate. *The relationship with the NHL team is helpful, I think that they have a vested interest. So they support what we are doing, but I think that there is a bunch of stuff that we have done with Brian, like implementing Sport Psychologists. He regularly visits with Sport Psychologists, and he has been opposed to it, up until this point. Now, the NHL team has mandated that he sees the sport psychologist and he is going to work in conjunction with their guy in [NHL team city]. The NHL team has been a great help there because what they have done is reinforce the stuff we tell him.* The coach also uses Brian's agent as a positive social influence. *I think the agent is key, because the agent is the filter of information for the parents and us or back and forth. So, I will tell you that he is kind of like a moderator, but also can reinforce what we are trying to say to him. So, when the father says, well he wants to be traded, well the agent can say hold on here this is going to happen with any team.*
Consequences: What the coach implemented (e.g., sent athlete home).	*I would say probably in the second half of last season he started to realize that the consequence for skipping school was not going to change. I find that when you are consistent with enforcing the rules and if you are open with the team about it, then they can understand it, and the players understand what's going on.* The coach also noted that addressing Brian's behaviour to the team is important to promote their culture. *When Brian misses school, we make a point of addressing the team, and say listen guys, Brian is not a bad guy, and he is our teammate, and we support him, but he missed school and we know what the rules are, so Brian won't be playing this Friday.* The coach also makes sure he does not publicly shame Brian, but shows respect when addressing the team. *One thing I tell Brian that shocks him is when I say "When I wake up in the morning and I have my coffee before my own kids wake up, what I think about is how are we going to get better today, how are we going to win the day. I don't wake up in the morning and make my coffee and say how can I screw Brian Kelly today, how am I going to pick on him so that he lacks confidence and plays like shit". When I tell him that, he understands, "Oh yeah, maybe coach isn't trying to do that".* The coach verbalizes that he is here to help Brian get better. *With Brian, up until this year I wouldn't say that he really has many friends on the team. He was kind of an island. Right, now he has developed some quality relationships with 3 or 4 guys, and it has helped quite a bit, it is positive.* Having friendships has helped Brian become more accountable.
Outcomes: How the difficult athlete responded (e.g., buy-in).	*I think that by explaining that [reasoning] to the team, not only helps Brian, but also I think it goes a long way in forming your team culture. I will say that by reinforcing the rules with Brian, it has probably helped our team, we don't have anybody else missing school, because he is the most skilled guy.* By implementing consequences, the coach believes it helps their team culture. *I think that maybe there is a perception amongst the players that, if they will sit him out, they will sit out anybody. We don't want to sit him out, but the worst thing we can do is to turn a blind eye. If we were to turn a blind-eye, I think you would lose credibility with the players on the team, especially if you've reinforced the rules with other players in the past. By ignoring what is going on, it can be a great detriment to the team. I think that by addressing issues you are also doing a service to the player. The easiest thing to do would be to do nothing.*

Appendix M: Rick Wainwright Narrative Timeline

TIMELINE	Rick Wainwright
Background: Behaviours difficult athlete displayed and their previous context.	*All of Rick's brothers have played in the CHL [so the coaches knew what to expect]. The boys are pretty rugged. They live in [city name], up in the countryside. Rick is really a bubbly personality, but he is looking for trouble at all times, but he is a really, really good player.* Rick comes from a hockey family, and a small, secluded town where he was able to do as he pleased and get away with certain behaviours because of his reputation in the town. He is a confident player with a very high hockey IQ and skill and does not like to miss out on any fun.
Actions: The difficult athlete actions or events that took place (e.g., broke curfew).	*Rick was out late, and after curfew and he got exposed, he got caught. So we sent him home, for seven days. And Rick was one of our best or better players at the time, and this decision wasn't very popular with the billet family, the agent or anything like that, that we would do something like that to him.* Rick broke team curfew and the coaching staff caught him disobeying these rules. The consequences for disobeying this team rule were made clear at the start of the season and the coaching staff had to follow through with the punishment, even though they did not necessarily want to. They followed their team rules, temporarily removing him form the team environment by sending him home, which made many individuals in Rick's social network upset.
Reactions: How coach responded using his environment (e.g., held a meeting).	*So Rick was exposed for breaking curfew. We brought him in, and he knew that we knew, when he came in to the rink the next day. It was very, very upfront and I said Rick look you made a mistake here, and you know there is no hiding it. And he agreed. I said, "Based on what's happened we are going to send you home. But I left him in the lurch there, because I told him we will call you. We haven't decided what we are going to do yet, but we will call you. We will call you. You will be back at some point. I have to talk to our ownership, and other people, its quite serious, the transgression here".* The coach met with Rick and sent him home for his behaviour. *He was in a great billet home, and someone whose brother [played in the CHL], well [billet name] was his billet. The billets were someone that you're not fooling, you're not fooling [billet name] she has seen it all. But, they have a great relationship. Rick still lives at their house for a stretch every summer. And they have really stayed in close contact, so it was a good situation for him all around.* The coach felt the billets really helped Rick to act responsibly. *We worked with Rick, he was drafted by the [NHL team name]. It was kind of obvious that he was going to be a professional hockey player. We really worked with Rick to turn him into a pro so that he wouldn't struggle in his first year of pro. He really bought in that way, because this was going to help him become a professional.* The coach helped Rick realize his actions needed to change if he wanted to play professional hockey. *We were in communication with his parents and informed them what was going on, so that they were aware. But I didn't talk to him for about three or four days. So, when I called him he was eager to come back.* The coach kept the parents informed of the plan they had for Rick to help facilitate this teachable moment, where Rick was going to learn from his mistake and build character.
Consequences: What the coach implemented (e.g., sent athlete home).	*When Rick came back, we addressed the team again and said "Rick has a clean slate here, so moving forward, nothing is going to be held against him here, Rick is a good guy who has made a bad mistake, which happens from time to time. But, Rick is our teammate, we love Rick, so moving forward, it's a clean slate. We are going to move forward and put that behind us".* The coach brought him back, and used his mistake as a learning opportunity not only for Rick, but also for the entire team. The coach also did not hold Rick's actions against him and addressed the issue with respect for Rick.
Outcomes: How the difficult athlete responded (e.g., buy-in).	*Rick ended up turning out to be a really good player for us. I think he will probably play in the NHL this year. Now when I talk to Rick or golf with him in the summer time, he always brings it up that this instance was maybe a turning point for him in his career. An awakening that the rules were going to be reinforced, and there's an example of a player who was a great teammate, very respectful of the coaching staff, a hard working player, but if there was something going on, he was going! I told him that he has FOMO, fear of missing out.* The coach's management of this athlete facilitated his professional development as a person. *With Rick, getting him to buy-in was just by reinforcing the rules. There wasn't anything on a day-to-day basis that was an issue, there was never an issue with his effort levels, or his respect towards his teammates or anything, it was just an issue with his off-ice pension for getting into trouble.* Rick learned from his mistake and was able to grow from his previous poor decisions and develop into a character young man and professional player.

Appendix N: Carl Jameson Narrative Timeline

TIMELINE	Carl Jameson
Background: Behaviours difficult athlete displayed and their previous context.	*Carl Jameson played in [city name] and we used to call him "[nickname], the hometown hero", and here was a guy that had everything going for him. A physical specimen, big, 6'3", 230 lbs., a guy that you know tough as nails, but living at home in [city name].* Carl played on the major junior team in his hometown, so he was able to live at home. *His dad protected him. I'd call him and he, his dad would say he is in for curfew, he was in for curfew, but you know he had 5 guys on our team there and they were drinking 20-30 beers but dad wanted to be one of the boys, you know he was the leader.* Carl's father was a poor role model for him because he did not hold Carl accountable to the team rules. *So he was a negative player in the sense that he took, even though he was a good player, he took so many guys in the wrong direction because he was a negative leader. The one thing with Carl, is he worked hard at the rink and in the weight room, but his off ice was a disaster.* Carl was a hard worker, however he had a social influence on his teammates and persuaded them to partake in deviant behaviour away from the rink.
Actions: The difficult athlete actions or events that took place (e.g., broke curfew).	*As Carl got older, it became more of a problem and when he was a 19-year-old and I realized a couple months into the season where there were a couple incidences. They went to the Casino [casino name] on a Sunday night off and one kid broke his wrist because they were drunk and he punched a wall.* Carl would rally his teammates to leave the city on days off to partake in risky behaviours that got them all into trouble. *Two weeks later we had a Sunday off, they went out down to [University name], one of my players called me to say Carl got in a fight with one of the players on the [university name] team.* The coach found that this deviant behaviour was beginning to disrupt their team environment.
Reactions: How coach responded using his environment (e.g., held a meeting).	*When you have a guy like Carl on your team, who can influence 4 or 5 other main guys on the team, it's next to impossible manage the group as a coach. I don't care what coaches say, it's impossible. When the teeter-totter is slanted and you're up there and you're holding on and you've got no balance and you're yelling and screaming and no one is listening, you know you're going to be up there for a long time.* Carl was a negative leader who possessed influence and power over his teammates and was able to undermine the coach's message, which created conflict and a potentially hostile environment that broke down the team culture.
What the coach implemented (e.g., sent athlete home).	The coach was unable to reach Carl and facilitate his commitment to the team's rules as he was bringing his teammates in the wrong direction and disrupting the team culture. *I knew there was no hope for the guy [Carl], so I realized at that time that I had to move him. I traded him to [city name] because they were going for a championship and even though their General Manager [name] at the time, who is very successful in the NHL now. I told him kind of what the kid was like and he thought well for the remaining three months it wont matter. So I traded him there and another kid because I just had to get him out of the dressing room because my younger guys, like my 16-year-olds like [star rookie player names 1 & 2] and those guys were great kids and I had to allow them to grow the way I wanted them to grow into character players and strong leaders.* Trading Carl resulted in the growth of the coach's younger players in a more supportive team environment.
Outcomes: How the difficult athlete responded (e.g., buy-in).	*If he had another year and ended up staying with us, we would have had a bad team for 3 or 4 years. So that's why I had to get him out of there. When I got him out of there, the next year we went, you know we finished first in our division but we still lost in the playoffs because we still had enough of that negative character there. And then a year later, lost the OHL finals to [team name] to a pretty good team. We had [star player rookie 1], [star player rookie 2], [star player second year]. We went right to the final. It was a good series.* Trading Carl allowed the young athletes to develop and the team culture to recover. *That allowed [the star players names] and those guys to grow. With Carl there, our young athletes would have come in and said "Okay this is how hockey works, you bully all the young kids, you treat them like shit, you don't respect curfews, you go out and you drink every night, you don't work hard".* Carl would have disrupted the new athletes development by providing poor role modeling for how to conduct yourself as a major junior hockey player. *So I traded him there [to team name] and I received the next year a defensemen named [player name] and he wasn't a bad player, and Carl went up there and basically ruined the [team name he was traded to] team. The GM was mad at me, the coach who was a friend of mine, who is now in the American League was mad at me, but I told them what Carl was like that. Carl was signed by the [NHL team name], went to the [NHL team name], played in the American League, he actually did pretty good, got up to play 14 games for the [NHL team name]. [The NHL GM] loved the way he played. But he got drunk at a [MLB baseball] game one night and they took video of him there and once [NHL GM name] and [NHL coach name] saw that, that was the end of his hockey career. I think he's working at Canadian Tire now. But that's a prime example of a negative leader and a guy that although I tried to get to and I mean I had a good relationship with him, I went to his wedding. He would probably tell you I was one of the most significant people in his life, but even though he had the respect for me, he was so set in his bad habits that it wasn't, nothing I was going to do was going to change him.*

Appendix O: Geoff Wagondale Narrative Timeline

TIMELINE	Geoff Wagondale
Background: Behaviours difficult athlete displayed and their previous context.	*Geoff Wagondale, played [in the NCAA]. He left to come back and play for me. I had a relationship with him because he had played at [city name] for [coach's friends name].* Geoff left the NCAA to come back and play in the CHL. *Geoff averaged 2 points a game when he played for me. I remember a game where he got a ten-minute misconduct. We were up 3-2 against [team name]. While he was in the penalty box, we scored 4 goals, and got up 7-2. He couldn't handle that we were scoring goals while he was in the penalty box, so he skated right to the bench, left and went home.* Geoff identified himself as a goal scorer and wanted to be that person on his teams. *Then, he was signed by the [NHL team name], it was the first time ever in my career that an NHL team called me and said please can you take him back as an overage because no one [wanted him]. He was scoring in the American League but he couldn't live with anybody, he couldn't get along with anybody, and they didn't know what to do.* Geoff had trouble living away from home and taking care of himself. *So you know, there was a guy who with me that was a challenge because with me he was fine, I knew how to deal with him, I understood. I knew his dad, who was an inner-city kid he didn't create any discipline for the kid, he just allowed him to do whatever he wanted. The kid had some huge emotional and social issues. With my background as an educator, I was able to deal with those things and I think because there was a lot of trust with him and I.* The coach understood and embraced Geoff's background.
Actions: The difficult athlete actions or events that took place (e.g., broke curfew).	*Geoff should have played in the NHL but could never play at any high level other than Europe because socially and emotionally he couldn't get along with his teammates or management.* Geoff had all of the talent and skill to be a pro, however he struggled with his behaviours and interactions with others. *He didn't understand the impact his actions had on teammates, he was unable to figure that out. To him, the game was all about him, and to him it was about was points, so he valued and related success totally to points.* Geoff disregarded the team's success to prioritize his own individual goals. *If he got 3 points a game, and we lost 4-3 than he had a good game. Because of that mindset the players respected his talents, but they didn't respect his commitment to the team, and they didn't respect him as a person. He had more of outcome orientation versus focusing on the processes and then because of that in the end, once we got in the playoffs when things got tough, we didn't do well because he reverted back to his selfishness.* In times of adversity, Geoff would revert back to his poor habits, which inhibited the team's ability to be successful. *I've always believed in the playoffs, your team goes as far as the group wants to stay together if they have enough talent. When the group doesn't want to stay together and wants to dissolve, it does. He had the ability, he could take the team into it, like one night he can win a game for you, and then the next night he can cost you a game because he'll do something stupid.* Geoff was inconsistent, and his inconsistency impacted his teammates and their team outcomes.
Reactions: How coach responded using his environment (e.g., held a meeting).	*I was lucky enough to have a guy named [team captain name] who is the coach of [team name] now, who played on his line. At 19 when he was a captain and knew how to deal with him. [Team captain name] liked and knew how to get the most out of Geoff. In managing Geoff, my captain and me talked daily and worked together. It was like Geoff was on a leash and [team captain name] was his trainer.* The coach used the team captain to facilitate the correct behaviours in Geoff. The captain was a close friend with Geoff because they played on the same line and were about the same age. Because of their relationship, the captain had more influence then the coach as an authority figure, so they worked in congruence to manage Geoff.
Consequences: What the coach implemented (e.g., sent athlete home).	They were able to control Geoff's emotions and behaviours in the team environment, however the cost of this may have be the athletic development of this team captain. This experience provided the captain with exceptional leadership opportunity and experience, however it took away from his athletic development due to the time commitment necessary to manage Geoff daily. *I'm not surprised [team captain name] is a successful coach now. But when I look back I wonder sometimes whether it was fair to him because maybe he didn't develop the way he needed to develop as a player, because there is so much emphasis or so much reliance on him to straighten out other guys. You've got to be careful of that as a coach, sometimes too that when you have difficult players you've got to understand that the players that are good people that you are trying to help you get this difficult player in line, sometimes it can affect their careers to and you have to be very careful balancing that.* Although the team captain became a successful coach himself, the coach felt it might have negatively influenced his athletic career.
Outcomes: How the difficult athlete responded (e.g., buy-in).	*Geoff played a lot of hockey, like he went over to Europe and he bounced around in Austria and Italy, probably played better in leagues where they didn't understand his language. He'd probably be better if he played in Russia, and he didn't speak Russian and they didn't speak English and he just played on the ice.* Geoff was able to play European professional hockey, however he never stayed with one single team and did fit well into the North American style of hockey. *All of his problems were self-induced because he was self-absorbed. He didn't see the world [clearly] the only world he saw was through his own eyes, and as an athlete when you are on a team, that's a no, no.* Geoff was unable to understand that for the team to be successful he needed to put the team's objectives ahead of his, however he wasn't able to grasp that concept.

Table 1. Participants Demographics

Pseudonym	Age Range	Highest Education	Playing Experience	Years of Elite Coaching Experience	Levels of Coaching Experience	International Coaching Experience	Team Championships	Additional Management Experience	Coaching Accolades
Ken	40-44	University - Bachelor's	NCAA, ECHL, AHL, Europe	14 (10 CHL)	Tier II Jr. A., CHL, CIS	U18, U20 (x2)	Tier II Jr. A., CIS, CHL League, Memorial Cup, Gold Medal	General Manager	Coach of the Year
Sean	40-44	University - Bachelor's	CHL, CIS	17 (17 CHL)	OHL	-	CHL Regular Season Champion	General Manager, Director of Hockey Operations	-
Scott	45-49	University - Bachelor's	CHL, CIS	21 (11 CHL)	Tier II Jr. A., CHL, CIS, NHL	U20 (x2)	Gold Medal	General Manager	General Manager of the Year
Daniel	45-49	High School	CHL, IHL, AHL, NHL	19 (10 CHL)	CHL, AHL, NHL	U18, U20 (x2)	CHL League (x2), Memorial Cup	-	Coach of the Year
Patrick	45-49	High School	CHL, IHL, AHL, NHL	11 (10 CHL)	CHL, OJHL	U18 (x3)	CHL, Gold Medal	-	-
Donald	50-54	University - Bachelor's	CHL, CIS	31 (21 CHL)	CHL, AHL, NHL	U20 (x2) U18 (x3)	CHL League, AHL, Gold Medal (x2)	General Manager	Coach of the Year (x2)
Rupert	60-64	University - Master's	-	26 (21 CHL)	CHL, Tier II Jr. A.	U18 (x3), U20 (x3)	Gold Medal (x2)	General Manager, Director of Hockey Operations	All-Star Selection
Roland	55-59	University - Bachelor's	CIS	29 (18 CHL)	CHL, CIS, NHL	U20	CIS, CHL League (x4), Memorial Cup, Gold Medal	General Manager, Director of Hockey Operations,	Coach of the Year
TOTALS	**Average Age of 50 years old**	**6 of 8 hold University Degrees**	**6 of 8 played at CHL[1] level or higher**	**21 is the average years of elite coaching experience**	**4 of 8 have NHL coaching experience**	**7 of 8 have international coaching experience**	**5 of 8 have league titles, 3 of 8 have national titles, 5 of 8 have international titles**	**6 of 8 have held General Manager Positions**	**6 of 8 have received league recognition for their efforts**

[1] CHL (Canadian Hockey League) is the governing organization for major junior hockey in Canada, which is composed of three operating leagues that are separated by geographical location and represented by the: Western Hockey League (WHL), Ontario Hockey League (OHL), and Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL).

Table 3. Significant Statements

- [Name of athlete] is the kind of kid that lacks structure and wasn't raised in a great environment. So for him, it was important to have a good billet, it was important… to not do anything like out of the ordinary.
- He was from another country. He was European. Emotionally, he was a bit unstable. He would be really affected by his girlfriend and things like that. He comes from a different culture, because for him, playing it was about scoring goals, just like that.
- Young guys are really competitive and the players that can be making a difference can usually be the ones that make it to the NHL. So they have a fire inside. They are competitors. Sometimes you know, they can be hard on others and hard on themselves.
- I think that every team has difficult players. And I believe they are often your most skilled players. How you manage these difficult players determines your success as a coach. And I see this all the time at the National Hockey League level, where players are given second and third chances, because of their skill level.
- Sean continuously misses class, so he continuously misses the opportunity to play. About four or five times a year, he will skip school and then we will sit him out on the weekend.
- He is today's stereotypical difficult athlete, there is no alcohol, no drugs, no off-ice antics; he just doesn't understand everything yet. Here, there is just, "this is the way we are doing things, and everyone here is treated equally" and Sean really struggles with that.
- [Name of athlete] was out late, and after curfew and he got exposed, he got caught. So we sent him home, for seven days. And [Name of athlete] was one of our best or better players at the time, and this decision wasn't very popular with the billet family, the agent or anything like that, that we would do something like that to him.
- But the [name of athlete] example I am using here, he has never really had to deal with any real type of adversity. So when there was adversity with the team, he was allowed to change teams and his parents facilitated that. If he had problems with a teammate he changes teams, and they would facilitate that. So, really, it's almost like an example of a kid who has never been told "no". So he has never had to deal with that on his own, so that's a whole set complex. That's been the case here right, as well.
- The most challenging behaviours these players display are disrespect towards their teammates. I think it's the most detrimental to the team concepts, if a player is in a certain situation and he expresses his displeasure but he demeans his teammates at the same time then you've got big problems.
- Most athletes would never define themselves as withholding effort. But, coaches sometimes do, and that's a very difficult bridge to gap.
- One of your nightmare situations as a coach is when you have leaders who are leading the group in the wrong direction. Your leaders are the most prominent figures in the room, but if they're the ones being the most off the wall, then you have problems.
- So [name of athlete] just alienated himself and pushed them off to his side and created almost an elitist attitude that nobody else shared. And it became worse when he had adversity, when things weren't going well, instead of helping the group as your best player, he became "well fuck you I'm doing my job your not doing yours". And it just created a huge divide in the room.
- His negative behaviour affected everyone in the room, and they started to react defensively, it created a split in the room, he became just a lone wolf, where he just wanted to do his own thing, and the rest of the group felt that he was a side from them.
- [Name of athlete] would go out of our dressing room, there is a door right by the Zamboni entrance, He would go out on his own, and I don't go in the room, my office is at the other end. [Name of athlete] would go out of the dressing room and dad would be down between periods coaching his kid.
- So with [name of athlete], it was like okay, there was so many [issues], you cant even [criticize him], you just have to emphasize the good, or else he will lose all of his confidence, but then you have to pick away at it.

- I struggled all year with his habits as far as in practice habits, I don't think he worked hard enough within drills, and that's skating ability, and that's 2nd and 3rd effort, to become the player that we thought he could become. We butted heads lots of times during the year and I would show him stuff [game film using video technology] on where he was resting on the ice.
- He [the difficult athlete] was unwilling to change, to change. I tried to do everything I could to get him to understand the importance of him as a player, and within our environment.
- I didn't feel that he was very good to younger players and this is what you have to understand, well you know, you've played the game. From my fact-finding missions, he didn't treat younger players very well because he had a higher opinion of himself inside the dressing room and inside the [team] family atmosphere.
- He never led by example; he always tried to lead verbally but did not follow it up with example. And kids are too smart nowadays, and that's why peer groups, these guys, their peer groups, they aren't about challenging each other verbally because it's too hard.
- The social media stuff, you know, what's put on Facebook, what you are saying on Instagram, what you are putting out on your Twitter account, you know all these things add up and at the end of the day that's who you are as a person a little bit, but they have to understand that sometimes those things can come back and have a reverse effect on your performance, and what you do daily.
- I might not think Player A deserves more ice time that game because of the way he has been playing but an agent, a parent, will have a different opinion, you know, because they don't think Player B is doing any better than Player A, those are the difficulties.
- The difficult athlete is more of an individual than he is a team guy, and the mistakes he makes are mistakes based on, "Well if I could have done this I might have scored", as apposed to "No, you don't try to poke a puck by a guy and keep going, just finish your check", and then finishing your check is the team concept.
- Those guys that are just dog fucking it, those are the guys that are difficult athletes because they don't want to have to work hard. They don't want to have to do all the little extra things. They don't want to put in the work to be that player. And that to me, that's what a difficult athlete is.
- I don't think we've ever shied away from a kid that maybe has had some difficult times. I can think of a number of managers that I have worked with that always gave second chances to guys that had difficult times in their careers. Whether it was through decisions they made, poor decisions off the ice, or through different attitudes or being too emotional. To show someone that has had difficulty an opportunity, that you care, and that there is a place for him in your organization. I think it goes a long way to that person when you develop a relationship where he knows that there is someone who is willing.
- I think there are others that are elite athletes, we also put kids into situations at 16 years old in this league where they maybe are thrust into an opportunity as a 16 year old and the rest of the team or the veteran component of your team is not real happy about it, that's not the fault of the young player, that's the coaches decision to put them in that situation.
- There is no question that sometimes kids are put into situations by the coaches that make it difficult for them too. They are difficult because you say they are difficult, but that's not their fault, that's the coaches' perspective. Maybe the way he [an athlete] carries himself is not very personable, but it's also in very passionate way, so he's also very confident and sometimes showing that confidence, or cockiness or arrogance, or whatever it is – and maybe that's not something you like as a coach.
- The most challenging or difficult behaviours to manage, which are more common now, are [players that have] learning difficulties with their focus and attention span. I would say that kids expectations of themselves in making the adjustment from where they came from and the environment where they came from to the expectation now of coming into a [new] team situation. I mean there are not many 16-year-old kids that come into our league now and are thrust into the same role as they were in as a minor midget if you look at it.
- There's two types of leaders–negative leaders and positive leaders–so you know sometimes a negative leader can create difficult players because if you as a coach are in the room and say "We're going up to

the weight room and we have to do this, this, and this". And one of the older players says, "We don't need to do that", if that player is looked upon as a leader, that can hinder you as a coach way more than you think.

- [Name of athlete] was a guy that: if I walked in the room and I said red, he would say blue and he had a lot of influence on guys. Now, because he was an inner city kid, he didn't, he had never met his dad, his mom was in prison, you dealt with him a little differently than when you would deal with an upper-middle class kid from Georgetown.
- [Name of athlete] was a kid that should have played in the NHL. But he could never play beyond our level at any high level other than Europe because socially and emotionally he couldn't get along with his teammates or management. He didn't understand the impact his actions had on teammates, he was unable to figure that out.
- I mean one of the more difficult guys I've ever coached was [name of athlete] and he was just a guy that had a terrible home life, you know. His dad always had a bad back so he didn't work. He had three brothers that [were lazy] you know. In other words he came in to the OHL as a sixth round pick and not a whole lot of good values at home to be honest and because of that I had constant challenges with him.
- When you have a guy like [name of athlete] on your team, who can influence 4 or 5 other main guys on the team, it's next to impossible manage the group as a coach. I don't care what coaches say, it's impossible. When the teeter-totter is slanted and you're up there and you're holding on and you've got no balance and you're yelling and screaming and no one is listening, you know you're going to be up there for a long time.
- Then there are kids like [name of athlete] who are up here [points to his office wall], won a few world championships now. He was a kid when he first came in and he was very young from [name of town], a little immature, a little self-absorbed, and a lot of the older guys thought he was a pretty selfish kid.
- Turning the athletes away from their points based performance to more of the process is a great challenge.
- The other voices influencing the [difficult] player are another great challenge for the coach. A lot of the agents, especially the medium to low-end agents, they only care about statistics. So they constantly pound on the players that you need numbers to be drafted and for your career to advance. They care nothing about their student success. They think that prime ice time and offensive numbers is the key for the player to move forward.
- I think they are good kids who have been in losing situations–everyone for themselves environments–but we think that we can polish these guys up, they're not down deep bad kids.
- You can have all of the great ideas in the world. If that leadership core is not selling what you are selling you are going to be at war everyday.
- Then we had brought in a guy [name of athlete], where everyone had said, "This is a bad kid, this is a troubled kid, this is a bad kid off the ice" some of it was probably true but we knew down deep, he was a kid in the wrong place.