

Coaches' Perceptions of Team Cohesion in Paralympic Sports

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The purpose of this study was to investigate Paralympic coaches' perceptions of team cohesion. Seven head coaches of summer and winter Canadian Paralympic sport teams participated in the study. Four participants coached individual sports and 3 coached team sports. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results addressed the coaches' perceptions of cohesion in the Paralympic sport setting and strategies used to foster cohesion with their teams. Participants described using techniques and strategies for enhancing cohesion that were similar to those in nondisability sport, such as task-related activities, goal setting, and regularly communicating with their athletes. They also listed how cohesion was distinct to the Paralympic setting, such as the importance of interpersonal activities to build social cohesion. The implications of these results for coaching athletes with a disability are also presented.

Keywords: coaching, group dynamics, athletes with a disability

Participation in Paralympic sports has grown substantially since 16 wheelchair competitors participated in an archery event in 1948 (Schültke, 2001), compared with over 4,000 athletes at the 2012 London games (International Paralympic Committee, 2013). The growth in the number of participants and the popularity of Paralympic sport has led to higher performance and competition levels. Despite this, research in Paralympic sport is limited, especially with regard to coaching (Hanrahan, 2007; Tawse, Bloom, Sabiston, & Reid, 2012). It is important to study coaching in Paralympic settings, given that research has found a relationship between coach behavior and improvements in athlete motivation and success (Banack, Sabiston, & Bloom, 2011; Cregan, Bloom, & Reid, 2007).

Coaching athletes requires fundamental skills such as providing appropriate feedback, setting realistic goals, developing skill progressions, and structuring