

Journal of Sport Pedagogy

Teaching and coaching in physical education and sports

Editorial Policy

The purpose of the *Journal of Sport Pedagogy* is to provide an international forum for the dissemination of ideas, informed opinion, and the results of research projects as they relate to all aspects of the teaching and coaching of physical education, sports and physical activity. The journal covers topics ranging from the practice of teaching to philosophical debate and scholarly activity. The *Journal of Sport Pedagogy* is aimed at a wide readership in schools, colleges, universities and related communities. From pre-school play education to teacher education and post-graduate study, the *Journal of Sport Pedagogy* provides an outlet for original, quality academic contributions of all types.

Editorial Correspondence

including manuscripts for submission, should be addressed to:

Editor

Dr Anthony Laker
Journal of Sport Pedagogy
PO Box 67, Plymouth, PL8 1YN, UK
email : tonylaker@email.msn.com

Business Correspondence

including subscriptions and advertisements should be addressed to:

Journal Manager

Julia L Craig
Journal of Sport Pedagogy
PO Box 67, Plymouth, PL8 1YN, UK

Associate Editor - USA

Dr Matthew Curtner-Smith
University of Alabama
College of Education
Box 870312, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 35487-0312
USA

Subscriptions

Each annual volume of the *Journal of Sport Pedagogy* consists of two issues. Annual subscription rate for individuals in the UK is £25, and £35 for UK institutions. Overseas subscriptions are (US)\$40 for individuals and (US)\$56 for institutions. Cheques payable to the *Journal of Sport Pedagogy*.

The *Journal of Sport Pedagogy* is indexed in the British Education Index.

ISSN 1369-8524

Journal of Sport Pedagogy

Teaching and coaching in physical education and sports

Volume 6

Issue 2

2000

Contents

Prospective Physical Educators' Perspectives on School Micropolitics <i>Juan-Miguel Fernández-Balboa</i>	1
The Relative Influence of Parents, Peers, and Sporting Heroes on Goal Orientations of Children and Adolescents in Sport <i>Sam Carr, Daniel Weigand, and Jason Jones</i>	34
Personal Characteristics of Expert Team Sport Coaches <i>Gordon A. Bloom and John H. Salmela</i>	56
A Comparison of Daily and 1 Day-a-Week Physical Education Programming on the Achievement of Motor Skills, Fitness, and Knowledge in Grades K-2. <i>Roxanne Light, Dale McVicker, Linda Carson, Andrew Hawkins, Lynn Housner, Laura Treanor, Sandra Vanin, and Robert Wiegand</i>	77

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPERT TEAM SPORT COACHES

Gordon A. Bloom
McGill University

and

John H. Salmela
University of Ottawa

Abstract

Although a substantial amount of research has examined expert coaches and teachers, up to this point, the personal characteristics that made these individuals especially effective have not been central or comprehensive to any research. The purpose of the current study was to address this gap in the literature by revealing the characteristics of expert coaches. In-depth open-ended interviews were conducted with 16 expert team sport coaches. The results revealed that the coaches have a persistent quest for personal growth and learning, as well as the ways of acquiring this knowledge. The results also explained the personal or individual aspects of coaching, such as the coaches' feelings about hard work, communicating effectively, empathizing with their players, developing a personal coaching style, having fun during training, and being a good teacher. The information is discussed in relation to research completed in the fields of expertise and coaching psychology.

Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to extend research on expertise by focusing on the importance of the coach's personal characteristics. The data in this paper, the third and final in a series, are a sub-set of a larger piece of work on expert team sport coaches. The other articles have looked at the pre- and postcompetition strategies of expert coaches (Bloom, Durand-Bush, & Salmela, 1997) and the importance of mentoring in the development of coaches and athletes (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998). The current study differs significantly in its focus, by drawing on the conceptual work of researchers in the fields of expertise and coaching psychology to help explain the personal characteristics of expert coaches. In particular, the work of Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1993), Ericsson and associates

(Ericsson & Charness, 1994; Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996), and Bloom (1985) will be discussed, with a particular emphasis on the coaches and teachers who helped performers excel in their fields.

Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1993) conducted a longitudinal study that examined the development of talent in five areas -- art, athletics, mathematics, music, and science. This work included several dimensions that were necessary to better understand the development of talent including the importance of coaches and teachers. Over 200 talented high school students were studied over a period of approximately four years. The purpose of this study was to determine which factors contributed to the development of talent in teenagers, and to the eventual lack of success in others. Using a very creative methodology that consisted of both quantitative and qualitative techniques, the researcher's reported that it was essential to have a qualified and experienced master teacher or coach to reach one's full potential.

In particular, Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) found three common characteristics of teachers who helped cultivate the talent of their students. For one, teachers were effective because they enjoyed what they were doing and encouraged their students to excel beyond their current level of performance. Second, teachers created optimal learning conditions so that students were not bored or excessively frustrated, enabling them to maximize their level of concentration, self-esteem, potency, and involvement. Finally, a third characteristic of distinguished teachers was their ability to understand the needs of students. They were remembered for their reassuring kindness as well as their genuine concern for the students' overall development, both inside and outside of school. In conclusion, these authors found that students could only learn if they were placed in enjoyable learning environments with individuals who knew how to provide both challenging and gratifying information.

Ericsson and associates (Ericsson & Charness, 1994; Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996) also researched the development of talent in various areas. Besides taking the understanding of expertise to new levels, Ericsson's research also had ramifications for expert coaches. Ericsson and colleagues argued that to reach a level of expertise involved more than innate abilities and was the result of activities that were designed to optimize improvement, a process that was labeled "deliberate practice." Ericsson et al.'s (1993) fundamental view is best summarized as follows:

"In contrast to play, deliberate practice is a highly structured activity, the explicit goal of which is to improve performance.

Specific tasks are invented to overcome weaknesses, and performance is carefully monitored to provide cues for ways to improve it further...the amount of time an individual is engaged in deliberate practice is monotonically related to that individual's acquired performance." (p. 368)

Resources, including time, energy, access to competent teachers and training facilities, as well as effort and motivation, were identified as constraints inhibiting the process of deliberate practice.

Ericsson and colleagues (1993, 1994, 1996) alluded to the importance of the coach or teacher in facilitating the process of deliberate practice. For example, in the absence of coaches or teachers, they found that individuals usually played rather than practiced. In addition, feedback was crucial and expert performers needed to be taught and corrected when errors occurred. It was also found that a teacher could hinder skill development by the use of inappropriate drills, exercises, and number of repetitions needed to reach exceptional performance.

Although Ericsson's research has yet to explicitly look at the sporting domain, many conclusions from these studies can be directly applied to coaches. For example, Ericsson et al. (1993, 1994) found that teachers play an important role in setting an appropriate environment for athletes to engage in the 10 years or 10,000 hours of deliberate practice that is required to develop expertise. The importance of this task should not go unnoticed. In fact, it was revealed that musicians who reached the highest levels of their profession deliberately practiced for 24.3 hours per week compared to 9.3 hours per week for those who were less accomplished. By the age of 18, the difference amounted to 7,140 hours of practice compared to 5,301 hours for the lesser skilled musicians.

The seminal work of Benjamin Bloom (1985) also has implications for talent development, particularly for coaches and teachers. Bloom interviewed 120 talented performers from different domains, including sport, since he believed that talented youth in any performance domain would exhibit similar developmental patterns. In particular, Bloom's research identified three phases of talent development for all performers, which he labeled as the early years, the middle developmental years, and the later years of perfecting the skills. Central to the development of the expert performer was the teacher, coach, or mentor.

Bloom (1985) found the first phase began when individuals were introduced to activities in their realm. This phase involved instruction from a local coach/teacher who was caring, thoughtful, and well respected in the community, and provided the performer with significant positive feedback. During the second phase or middle years, the teacher/coach was more technically advanced

and was regarded as one of the best within a larger geographical area. Exceptional athletes auditioned for the opportunity to work with still another coach during the third stage, i.e., an individual widely recognized as a master teacher or expert in his/her domain. The relationship between athlete and expert coach involved into one of mutual respect and collegiality with both parties focusing less on instructional methods and more on tactical refinement.

While all three of these bodies of research highlighted the role of the coach, they mainly focused on the process of instruction. Recent empirical research in the area of coaching psychology from Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, and Russell (1995) found that instruction was only one of the many important roles of expert coaches. Côté and colleagues interviewed 17 expert Canadian gymnastic

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Expert Coaches

Coach	Years Coaching	University Level	National Level	Gender	Years Coaching	
					M	or F
1BB	39	9	16	M	39	1
2BB	26	15	1	M	7	21
3BB	28	18	--	M	10	18
4BB	43	21	8	M	34	10
5BB	21	18	2	F	--	21
6BB	34	20	5	M	29	7
7VB	15	14	--	F	--	15
8VB	25	16	9	M	13	18
9VB	16	12	--	M	16	1
10FH	22	17	10	F	2	22
11FH	17	15	5	F	--	17
12FH	25	20	17	F	2	25
13IH	31	22	3	M	31	--
14IH	36	29	3	M	36	--
15IH	23	11	8	M	23	--
16IH	21	12	2	M	21	--

Legend: BB=basketball coaches VB=volleyball coaches
FH=field hockey coaches IH=ice hockey coaches

coaches using open-ended questions designed to explore the structure of coaching knowledge. An inductive analysis of the data resulted in the conceptualization of a coaching model (CM) consisting of three central components of organization, training, and competition, as well as three peripheral components, including the coach's characteristics, the gymnast's personal characteristics and level of development, and the contextual factors. Côté and colleagues defined the coach's characteristics as "any variables that

are part of the coach's philosophy, perceptions, beliefs, or personal life that could influence the organization, training, or competition components" (p. 11). Côté and colleagues noted further that "without a general model of coaching, the knowledge accumulated through research remains disconnected information related to how and why coaches work as they do" (p. 2).

A great deal of information can also be derived from other studies in which characteristics or qualities of coaches are examined. In a number of empirical studies or retrospective profiles of successful coaches, valuable information on different areas of coaching, such as strategies, training techniques, coaching philosophies, or future recommendations have been provided (e.g., Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999; Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Streat, Senecal, Howlett, & Burgess, 1997; Walton, 1992; Wrisberg, 1990). Finally, in a series of studies, Gould and colleagues (Gould, Giannini, Krane, & Hodge, 1990; Gould, Hodge, Peterson, & Giannini, 1989; Gould, Hodge, Peterson, & Petlichkoff, 1987) identified the needs of elite coaches, in areas such as coach education, coach development, and the use of psychological strategies. In conclusion, the research in the area of coaching psychology has provided information on a number of different areas relating to successful coaches. Up to this point, none of these studies have focused solely on identifying the personal characteristics of expert coaches. Thus, an examination of this topic seems timely.

Method

Participants

Sixteen expert Canadian coaches from the team sports of basketball (n=6), field hockey (n=3), ice hockey (n=4), and volleyball (n=3) were chosen by their National Sport Organizations as being the most knowledgeable and respected in their country. Peers and sport-governing bodies also selected the participants based on won/loss percentages as well as quantity of national and international elite performers produced at the time of selection. Their professional positions varied from the intercollegiate level to current and former national team coaches, and they had coached at the elite level for an average of 19.9 years. For a more detailed account of these coaches see Table 1.

Interview Technique

The senior researcher interviewed each coach from one-and-a-half to three hours. The location of the interviews ranged from the team's training facilities, to hotel rooms, to the home of one coach. The interviewer was experienced in conducting interviews, and also had experience working with elite level coaches, including understanding the terminology and nature of their sport.

This activity is known as prolonged engagement, and was one method of ensuring the trustworthiness of the data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Eklund (1996) and Jackson (1995) both identified the credibility of those involved in the research team as an important component of qualitative research.

The different types of interviews can be conceptualized on a continuum with those ranging from structured or focused to those labeled as unstructured, elite, or exploratory (Dexter, 1970; Richardson, Dohrenwend, & Klein, 1965). In unstructured and semi-structured approaches, the research problem and questions have not been formulated ahead of time, to avoid forcing or guiding the subject to respond in a manner or framework which has been posited by the researcher beforehand. More specifically, Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated that in these two types of interviews "the format is nonstandardized, and the interviewer does not seek normative responses. Rather the problem of interest is expected to arise from the respondent's reaction to the broad issue raised by the inquirer" (p. 156).

In an unstructured or semi-structured interview, the best responses are often elicited by open-ended questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). These questions do not limit the respondent's answers to a certain topical area. An actual interview guide was not required since the coaches were instructed beforehand to recount their careers regarding the most important areas of coaching, such as those related to competition, organizing their team, training, and their interactions with athletes. A semi-structured approach was used since an initial understanding of these issues was forwarded from recent research on expert gymnastic coaches (e.g., Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995).

Patton (1990) discussed many crucial factors pertaining to successful interviewing. In particular, two of these factors were followed in the present research. One method was to word questions as precisely as possible, using jargon or terminology familiar to the expert candidate. Second, Patton talked about probing, to help redefine and elaborate on material mentioned in the interview. Whenever the terminology or details of a topic were confusing or lacked depth, detailed probe questioning was employed. An example of probe questioning occurred with one of the basketball coaches in response to the area of athlete empowerment. The interviewer asked: "In what sort of ways do you give your athletes more control?" A different type of probe questioning was used to help understand the links between the coaches' knowledge in different areas, such as the coach's personal characteristics and competition. For example, many coaches were asked: "How do your personal characteristics affect your team before, during, and after competitions?"

Analysis

An objective when analyzing semi-structured interviews is to create an ongoing system of emerging categories that adequately represent the knowledge of those being interviewed. Côté and colleagues' (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993; Côté, Salmela, & Russell, 1995) methods for analyzing qualitative data were used in this study. This consisted of three main steps: creating tags, creating properties, and creating and conceptualizing categories.

Creating tags. The first step of qualitative analysis is to divide the entire text into separate meaningful pieces of information called "meaning units" (Côté et al., 1993; Tesch, 1990). Tesch defined a meaning unit as a "segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of information" (p. 116). Each meaning unit in the current study was then named or "tagged" based on its content. Some of the tags describing the topics included mental preparation of coaches, emotions, respect, and time-outs. The goal of this stage was to separate similar data segments from their context with like tags, a process referred to as "de-contextualizing" the information (Tesch, 1990). The 16 interview transcripts were analyzed on a line-by-line basis, resulting in a total of 1,276 meaning units and 79 different tags.

Creating properties. The second step of interpretation analysis was creating properties. This involved listing and comparing the tags created in the first phase. Tesch (1990) described the purpose of this process as "re-contextualizing" the information, which served as a preliminary organizing system for the data. Similar tags were regrouped and organized into distinct categories that were referred to as properties (Côté et al., 1993). Côté and associates noted that it was important that the tags, not the meaning units, were compared in this phase. An inductive form of data analysis took place, whereby the data were continuously modified and analyzed until a consensus of all the properties identified were agreed upon by all of the judges. In the present study, the 79 tags were grouped into 22 properties. Three of these properties are included in the current study – desire to learn, ways of acquiring knowledge, and personal approaches to coaching.

Creating and conceptualizing categories. The final stage of analysis involved regrouping the properties identified in the previous stage into broader conceptual ones, thus creating a small number of higher-order categories. In a sense, this step is similar to the earlier stage of creating properties, except it is now done at a higher and more abstract level of analysis (Côté, Salmela, & Russell, 1995). The data were examined until a saturation of understanding was reached and no new categories of information emerged at all levels (Côté, Salmela, & Russell, 1995). At this point, the 22 properties were gathered

together and re-divided into six different categories, one of which was called the Coach's Personal Characteristics.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Qualitative or naturalistic inquirers are often questioned regarding the trustworthiness of their analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sparkes, 1998). The current study incorporated a number of methods to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis. In particular, suggestions forwarded by Patton (1990) and Lincoln and Guba were employed.

To begin, all raw data were transcribed verbatim from the cassette to a typed format immediately after completion of each interview. Microsoft Access was used to facilitate the data organization. This program allowed each segment of text to be grouped and categorized separately, and also to be moved and re-labeled each time higher-order categories were developed. In total, 11,572 lines or 320 pages of single spaced manuscript text was gathered for the research project.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to persistent observation. A competent qualitative investigator is able to focus on the most important points being relayed to him or her, and similarly pass over or ignore irrelevant facts. More precisely, the inquirer must "continuously engage in tentative labeling of what are taken as salient factors and then exploring them in detail, to the point where either the initial assessment is seen to be erroneous, or the factors are understood in a nonsuperficial way" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). Thus, the coaches were often probed (Patton, 1990) to ensure that what they were saying was understood and that they had enough time to complete their answer. Furthermore, the coaches were always given the chance to come back to any issue or idea which they felt was important or required further clarification. Finally, the interview always ended with the following question: "Is there anything else that has not been covered that you feel is an important aspect of your job?"

Peer debriefing was another form of data analysis verification that was used in the current analysis. In this case, the two researchers were probed by individuals acting as protagonists, whereby "...the inquirer's biases are probed, meanings explored, the basis for interpretations clarified. All questions are in order during a debriefing, whether they pertain to substantive, methodological, legal, ethical, or any other relevant matters" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). In the present analysis there were three graduate students (at both the masters and doctoral levels) who had experience with qualitative research analysis methods, who acted as the debriefers and helped with both the conceptualization and

Table 2
Number of Tags and Meaning Units by Sport by Each Property of Coach's Personal Characteristics

PROPERTY AND TAG	N	Basketball (N=6)	Volleyball (N=3)	Field Hockey (N=3)	Ice Hockey (N=4)
Desire to Learn	175	61	21	31	62
1. Gaining knowledge	43	13	5	9	16
2. Always learning	29	5	4	5	15
3. Coach maturing	24	12	4	4	4
4. Self-evaluation	14	7	2	0	5
5. Career choice	7	1	1	0	5
6. Personal reflections	22	7	2	5	8
7. Personal life	22	10	1	4	7
8. Joy of coaching	14	6	2	4	2
Ways of Acquiring Knowledge	94	30	19	18	27
1. Clinics / seminars / symposia	25	8	5	1	11
2. Mentors	21	10	4	2	5
3. Learning from others	35	9	7	11	8
4. Sharing information	13	3	3	4	3
Personal Approaches to Coaching	69	28	4	15	2
1. Hard work	9	1	0	4	4
2. Communicating	12	6	0	1	5
3. Empathy	8	5	0	1	2
4. Personal style	20	10	3	3	4
5. Having fun	6	1	1	3	1
6. Good teacher	14	5	0	3	6
TOTALS	338	119	44	64	111

coding of the data. These individuals each randomly examined 25% of the meaning units. When disagreements between the investigators emerged, they restudied the meaning units and transcripts and deliberated on points of contention until a consensus was reached. The same process was undertaken to verify the appropriateness of the grouping of tags and properties into higher-order categories.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checks are the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. This allows the researchers' conclusions to be evaluated by the expert team sport coaches who provided the information. For this study, all the coaches were mailed a copy of the transcript for authentication prior to analysis. They were allowed to edit or correct any information that they believed was incomplete or damaging to themselves or others named or alluded to in the text. The main portion of their comments related to grammatical errors in the manuscript; none of the coaches altered any information that they perceived to be damaging or untrue. Second, all coaches received the final categories with an analytical story describing the relationship between the categories. A cover letter accompanied this document and explained methods used in the study, along with the results, and then invited the coaches to assess the categories and the story. A self-addressed stamped envelope was included with each package. Approximately, two thirds of the coaches returned their documents. This process resulted in some definitional clarification, category conceptualization, and a strong corroboration that the personal characteristics of these coaches were captured.

Results

The total number of meaning units from the interviews was 1,276, of which 338 or 26.5% related to the coach's personal characteristics. The focus of this study is on the data contained within the category called coach's personal characteristics. The three properties classified in this category were labeled as desire to learn, ways of acquiring knowledge, and personal approaches to coaching. A breakdown of the subcomponents within this category can be seen in Table 2. An explanation of this category will now take place by discussing each of its three properties.

Desire to Learn

An important part of the personality and knowledge of coaches was shaped by their desire to continue growing as a coach. Within this property, a number of ideas that coaches held about coach education, updating their knowledge,

along with some of their personal reflections emerged. Just because they made it to the top of their profession did not mean these experts ceased striving to improve. On the contrary, to most coaches, it was a challenge to get better and continue learning:

“I read a lot about other coaches, and it’s great. Every time I go to the bookstore I go through every book, and if there’s one by a coach, I buy it. I’m trying to find out what makes the guy tick.” (Ice hockey coach)

“I recently went to Japan to study volleyball for three weeks. We learned some new things about defense, ball control, and time input. We were at the first practice from 9 to 12. We were sitting at the second practice at 2:30, and by 6:30 we were looking at each other and starting to bet how long this would go. It went until about 8 and then they did an hour of weights. We went to different teams and it was the same – unbelievable. Nobody back home could relate to this.” (Volleyball coach)

“I wish when I was playing, I had been a little more alert to writing things down. The first time I ever started writing things down was when I played college hockey. If the coach ran a good drill, I’d write it down. But I think about all the hockey I played before that, and I never ever thought about anything I did. I’ve now become a very good person at recording everything I do.” (Ice hockey coach)

Along the same line, many of these coaches stated how they have continuously evolved and matured as they have gained more experience. Sometimes this was a conscious decision, whereas other times it was not:

“You think you have it all and some new thing comes along, and there is an evolution. This occurs with the physical, biomechanical, psychological, and strength training things. It seems that I am never at the point where I will know it all. I think the cliché is true that you never stop learning.” (Volleyball coach)

For many of these coaches it was not enough to maintain an open mind to learn. They also constantly attempted to evaluate their own progress and implemented those career changes that they felt would help them improve.

“I guess the net result is you really have to know yourself as a coach. I don’t believe that many coaches spend much time coaching and criticizing themselves. We are all reluctant to do that. I think that is the most important thing; you have got to be assessing what you are, who you are, and what you are supposed to be doing.” (Basketball coach)

“Looking back over my coaching career, I would have started earlier if I had any inclination that it was this much fun. I would have gotten more serious about school and maybe even gotten a physical education degree. I’m not saying it would have helped me with my communication, but perhaps with some of the biomechanics.” (Basketball coach)

“I don’t think I would do anything different. I think I have been really lucky. I always wanted to coach and I did it immediately. I thought I had something to say that would help people, and I was really lucky with the timing of things and the way it happened. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time.” (Field hockey coach)

One challenging area to intensely pursuing a coaching career can be seen in the compromises these coaches made to both their personal and family relationships. Because many of them traveled between 100-200 days a year, they felt tremendous strain on their personal relationships. One common solution to the various stresses on these coaches was to find a partner that was either a coach or had previously devoted a great deal of time to the sport and could empathize with the demands of this profession.

“I don’t have any children and I am married to a man who lives and dies with basketball coaching and understands it. He is very supportive and we spend a lot of our time together doing basketball, so I don’t have to sacrifice a lot and neither does my husband. A lot of women in coaching have a really tough time as it is very demanding on their families. It is very strange because you are traveling a lot, you are away on weekends, and you are usually coaching through the supper hours.” (Basketball coach)

“For me, the downside is being away from my two children. I am really lucky because I am the only one in our sport who has

children. When they were young and I was pregnant, they traveled with me. We would bring a baby-sitter.” (Field hockey coach)

Finally, it was interesting to note that although these coaches seemed critical about their own abilities and made lots of personal sacrifices, there was nothing else they would rather be doing. For many of them, the desire to learn has been both challenging and enjoyable:

“It is not easy being a coach. We must demonstrate to younger coaches that it is not easy. Yet, it is the most exciting, rewarding career of the lot. I don’t think there is a career more exciting than coaching.” (Field hockey coach)

“A philosophy that I have taken is never to look back. I’ve always felt there has been a reason for everything and I’m not sure I would do anything differently. I feel pretty fortunate to be where I’m at, to have had the experiences I have had – anything else to me is gravy. For 14 years I’ve done something I love doing. I got paid for it and I’ve met a tremendous amount of people while I’ve been doing it. Now they are paying me even more to do it.” (Ice hockey coach)

Ways of Acquiring Knowledge

While the previous section outlined the coaches’ attitudes and characteristics about maturing and learning as a coach, this section will elaborate ways of nurturing this learning process. More specifically, the perceived importance of acquiring knowledge through mentoring, attending clinics, seminars, and symposia, and learning from others will be presented.

All of the coaches interviewed, most of whom had reached the highest levels of coaching, supported the coaching education or certification programs. The coaches felt it was important to acquire knowledge through clinics, seminars, and symposia:

“I still go to a clinic and learn something despite the fact I have coached junior high athletes for nine years, high school for three years, club and provincial teams for two years, university for nine years, and the national team for four years. I think I have a pretty broad perspective and I still will go to a clinic and somebody will say ‘no, at our school we do it this way.’ ” (Volleyball coach)

Aside from learning through clinics, seminars, and symposia, many coaches elaborated upon the importance of mentoring and learning from others. Because many were influenced by at least one important mentor coach, they were willing to offer similar experiences to individuals they viewed as special. Similar to mentoring aspiring coaches, they were also willing to share information with other coaches. According to these coaches, an important part of the learning process involved passing on valuable insights to others.

“The mentor coach has to be a teacher who can communicate information, not someone who can just relay a system and has you pick up balls. You need a mentor coach who challenges you to learn about coaching, kids, and all the other components. As mentor coaches, we take responsibility to do that. Unless we care about that, coaches are not going to become better coaches.” (Basketball coach)

“Younger coaches don’t observe practices of senior coaches as much as they used to. Nobody invited me to a practice. I finally asked the coach of our National team if I could watch a couple of his practices. He looked like he was stunned that somebody should ask. It still doesn’t happen – coaches don’t go to coaches. I don’t know what the reason is, whether it is an ego thing or whether they are afraid.” (Basketball coach)

“I think there has to be more sharing and it has to be a part of the mandate. I think that if you are successful, you have to say what worked. You have to understand that it is not a big mystical thing. There are lots of other people who can be successful at it.” (Basketball coach)

Personal Approaches to Coaching

So far the knowledge that related to the coaches’ desire to learn and the ways of acquiring this knowledge were presented. The third and final property, personal approaches to coaching, represented more of the individual aspects of coaching. The meaning units contained within this property included coaches’ feelings about hard work, communicating effectively, empathizing with their players, developing a personal coaching style, having fun during training, and being a good teacher.

Many people have faith in the connection between hard work and success. According to the coaches in this study, this relationship was central in the sport

Personal characteristics

setting, and many believed they had to work harder than their colleagues:

“Coaching is hard work, so you have got to enjoy it. You have got to get a coach who is going to enjoy hard work.” (Field hockey coach)

“Hard work is important. The work ethic in a coach is just as important and demanding as the one from the players.” (Ice hockey coach)

To go along with hard work, coaches also felt it was important to communicate effectively. The area of communication can be seen throughout the coaching process and thus becomes a valuable attribute:

“The toughest part of coaching is that you’re delivering information that players don’t want to hear. Sometimes people say you’re not a good communicator. I argue that, ‘No, I’m a very good communicator, I’m just not telling you what you want to hear.’” (Ice hockey coach)

In the area of communication with athletes, the present coaches believed it was important to understand the feelings of their athletes. One attitudinal characteristic common with many of the coaches was empathy.

“For me as a coach, I realize what I went through as an athlete. I realize the athletes are going to have problems making adjustments. As a coach, you have to understand where they are coming from.” (Field hockey coach)

“One of my players once told me that one of the best things about playing with my team is that whenever he had to go home, I never once asked why.” (Basketball coach)

Everything that has been alluded to so far in this property was directly or indirectly related to developing a personalized coaching style. Coaches felt that in order to succeed they had to develop a coaching style which best suited their personality. Thus, emulating other successful coaches was not always the best way to proceed:

“The biggest challenge for you when you’re young is that you want to emulate somebody. You see somebody and say, ‘Gee, I would like to coach like that.’ Although you might like some of the things that he does, in essence, you coach the way you

Personal characteristics

naturally react, using your own instincts. If you ever try to be somebody you’re not, I think you will have a real problem with coaching.” (Ice hockey coach)

Another personal approach that some of these coaches followed involved the notion of having fun during training. Not all of the coaches in the sample felt this way, but four of them did say it was important at certain times to enjoy the process with the team.

“Every so often I’ll have a practice that I call a ‘no brain practice,’ and you have to have one of those. You’ve gone through a lot of games and the guys are mentally fatigued and physically tired. If I go out there and try to run through a tedious practice, it isn’t going to work. So, I’ll say that tomorrow will be a no brainer.” (Ice hockey coach)

“Today at practice we only had one goalie, so I had to think of something different. Since there were kids’ basketball nets in the gym, we set them up, put pinnies in the net and put cones with balls on them. This became absolutely hilarious. One of our best shooters is going down and is trying to hit this ball off the cone. Everybody got a kick out of it. We all laughed and said this ought to be good, and then we went at it. You see, there are different ways to bring a little bit of laughter to it, that type of thing.” (Field hockey coach)

Perhaps an important theme to this entire category was that all these coaches aspired to be the best in their field. Listed below are quotations that are related to the process of becoming a good teacher/coach:

“There are no big secrets. Some people coach better than other people do because that is the way they are. I don’t have any problems showing anybody what I do because I think that I teach better than anybody around.” (Basketball coach)

“It’s those little teaching points that you don’t think are very important, that are only minute things, that the athlete says, ‘How did he think about that?’ You think it’s a small point, and to him it is a small point, but it is a big point too. He is thinking, ‘How did the guy figure that out – Gee, that’s a smart little point.’ I think that’s part of being a good coach.” (Ice hockey coach)

Discussion

The coaches' persistent quest for personal growth, learning, and development, and the ways of nurturing this process through continuous learning were outlined in this study. The data also demonstrated the drive and determination and personal approaches to coaching of these expert individuals. It can be argued that the coaches' personal characteristics require particular consideration since this information appears to infuse energy and direct all other areas of the coaching profession. For example, coaches who choose to attend clinics, seminars, and symposia in order to update their knowledge, who share information with other coaches, who are always willing to learn and evaluate their progress, will probably have more interesting practices, more detailed seasonal plans, and thus, more success at competitions. Along the same line, coaches with more intricate personal approaches to coaching, such as working harder and communicating more effectively, will have happier players who will produce better results during competition.

Some of the information elicited from the coaches in the present study can be compared to research on expert teachers and coaches (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Ericsson et al., 1993, 1994). The above studies found that the influence of teachers and coaches was a central determinant for the rise to prominence of expert performers. While these authors highlighted the importance of their years of practice and dedication, they did not explicitly examine the nature of the assistance provided by these coaches or teachers. Many failed to realize that teachers and coaches dedicated the same amount of practice time as their athletes and probably spent more preparation time prior to training. The present analysis demonstrated that expert coaches were fervently devoted to their involvement in sport as exemplified by their commitment to hard work and their search for improvement in their coaching knowledge. They accomplished these tasks in a number of ways, including attending clinics, seminars, and symposia, seeking mentors, reading coaching books and manuals, and watching and studying other successful coaches. These ways of learning were analogous to those of the music teachers in the research of Ericsson et al. as well as the individual sport coaches in Bloom's research. Although these previous studies on expert teachers and coaches did not specifically consider this topic from their perspective, they suggested that expert teachers and coaches across many domains might possess similar characteristics and initiatives to the elite students or athletes with whom they worked.

The category of coach's personal characteristics extended beyond the coaches' desire to learn and ways of learning. Also included were their own

personal or individual characteristics regarding coaching, i.e., those dimensions that set these coaches apart from others. According to these coaches, there was no clear way to develop a unique coaching style; they had to transform their own personal characteristics into a style with which they were most comfortable. Nevertheless, these experts espoused the importance of several areas, including working harder than others do, communicating effectively, and empathizing with their players.

The research of Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) has some interesting similarities with the results of the current study. In their examination of talented high school students, Csikszentmihalyi et al. identified three common characteristics of teachers who helped cultivate the talent of their students. First, the teachers enjoyed the teaching process. Second, they encouraged their students to excel beyond their current level of talent by creating optimal learning conditions. Third, these teachers were commended for their ability to understand the needs of their students and for their reassuring kindness. All three of these characteristics emerged in the present study. More precisely, the expert coaches expressed their deep satisfaction or joy of coaching, how they were enamored by their profession and how there was nothing else they would rather be doing. This partly explains why these coaches worked so hard; to them, this intensity was pleasurable, even if it meant watching game films late at night or giving up long week-ends with their families to recruit new players.

In the coaching model, Côté, Salmela, Trudel, et al. (1995) considered the characteristics of the coach, within which the knowledge or philosophy of coaches was described. Their coach-oriented category was analogous, yet differed greatly in its relative complexity to the current study. The main reason for this may be that Côté, Salmela, Trudel, et al.'s research was not intended to focus on the interaction of the coach's characteristics. It was designed to lay out the structure of knowledge categories that led to the development of elite gymnasts. The present study elaborated upon the pursuit of knowledge that motivated these coaches, and how this knowledge acquisition influenced all other dimensions of coaching. It was a combination of the three properties in the current study that defined the special nature of these leaders in sport. The totality of these three properties ultimately affected the ways in which they organized their season, trained their team, competed, and interacted with their athletes within diverse coaching contexts.

Many aspects of the coach's personal characteristics have just been discussed. Although certain research has targeted expert coaches (e.g., Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999; Côté, Salmela, Trudel et al, 1995; Gould et al., 1989, 1990; Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Wrisberg, 1990), up to this point, the

personal characteristics and interactions that made these individuals especially effective have not been central nor comprehensive to their research. Perhaps, this omission occurred because much of the literature on expertise focused mainly on the needs of the performer, rather than the development, knowledge, or characteristics of coaches or teachers. Whatever the case, the coach's personal characteristics has demonstrated the importance of knowing the personal make-up of coaches and has gone beyond the simple understanding of their technical or tactical skills. One coach from the present study best summarized this view in the following manner:

"I've done many coaching clinics where coaches ask me, 'Gee, why would you give information away; now I know what you are going to do next?' I always say it doesn't matter because they don't know how I do it. He's got [the information], but he doesn't know how I teach it. To me, that's the secret. It's how you teach and explain it, what drills and teaching cues you use with the athletes. I could even give the teaching cues away. It's how you sell them, how you're emphatic, and how you look the guy in the eye." (Ice hockey coach)

References

- Bloom, B.S. (Ed.), (1985). *Developing talent in young people*. New York: Ballantine.
- Bloom, G.A., Crumpton, R., & Anderson, J.E. (1999). A systematic observation study of the teaching behaviors of an expert basketball coach. *The Sport Psychologist*, 13, 157-170.
- Bloom, G.A., Durand-Bush, N., & Salmela, J.H. (1997). Pre- and postcompetition routines of expert coaches of team sports. *The Sport Psychologist*, 11, 127-141.
- Bloom, G.A., Durand-Bush, N., Schinke, R.J., & Salmela, J.H. (1998). The importance of mentoring in the development of coaches and athletes. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 29, 267-281.
- Côté, J., Salmela, J.H., Baria, A., & Russell, S.J. (1993). Organizing and interpreting unstructured qualitative data. *The Sport Psychologist*, 6, 55-65.
- Côté, J., Salmela, J.H., & Russell, S.J. (1995). The knowledge of high-performance gymnastic coaches: Methodological framework. *The Sport Psychologist*, 9, 65-75.

- Côté, J., Salmela, J.H., Trudel, P., Baria, A., & Russell, S.J. (1995). The coaching model: A grounded assessment of expert gymnastic coaches' knowledge. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 17, 1-17.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., Rathunde, K., & Whalen, S. (1993). *Talented teenagers: The roots of success and failure*. New York: Cambridge.
- Dexter, L.A. (1970). *Elite and specialized interviewing*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Eklund, R. (1996). Preparing to compete: A season-long investigation with collegiate wrestlers. *The Sport Psychologist*, 10, 111-131.
- Ericsson, K.A., & Charness, N. (1994). Expert performance. *American Psychologist*, 49, 725-747.
- Ericsson, K.A., Krampe, R.T., & Tesch-Römer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. *Psychological Review*, 100, 363-406.
- Ericsson, K.A., & Lehmann, A.C. (1996). Expert and exceptional performance: Evidence of maximal adaptation to task constraints. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 47, 273-305.
- Gould, D., Giannini, J., Krane, V., & Hodge, K. (1990). Educational needs of elite U.S. National Team, Pan American and Olympic coaches. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 9, 332-344.
- Gould, D., Hodge, K., Peterson, K., & Giannini, J. (1989). An exploratory examination of strategies used by elite coaches to enhance self-efficacy in athletes. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 11, 128-140.
- Gould, D., Hodge, K., Peterson, K., & Petlichkoff, L. (1987). Psychological foundations of coaching: Similarities and differences among intercollegiate wrestling coaches. *The Sport Psychologist*, 1, 293-308.
- Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1981). *Effective evaluation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Jackson, S. (1995). Factors influencing the occurrence of flow state in elite athletes. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 7, 138-166.
- Kimiecik, J., & Gould, D. (1987). Coaching psychology: The case of James "Doc" Counsilman. *The Sport Psychologist*, 1, 350-358.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London: Sage.
- Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods: Second edition*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Richardson, S.A., Dohrenwend, B.S., & Klein, D. (1965). *Interviewing: Its forms and functions*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sparkes, A.C. (1998). Validity in qualitative inquiry and the problem of criteria: Implications for sport psychology. *The Sport Psychologist*, 12, 363-386.

Personal characteristics

- Strean, W.B., Senecal, K.L., Howlett, S.G., & Burgess, J.M. (1997). Xs and Os and what the coach knows: Improving team strategy through critical thinking. *The Sport Psychologist*, 11, 243-256.
- Tesch, R. (1990). *Qualitative research analysis types and software tools*. New York: Falmer Press.
- Walton, G.M. (1992). *Beyond winning: The timeless wisdom of great philosopher coaches*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Wrisberg, C.A. (1990). An interview with Pat Head Summitt. *The Sport Psychologist*, 4, 181-191.

The authors wish to thank Luiz-Carlos Moraes, Natalie Durand-Bush and Patricia Miller for their assistance. This research was supported in part from Sport Canada's Applied Research Grants and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada 401-94-0402.

pl
th
a-
re
of
ar
pr
re
th
co
ab
Ol
le:
Ar
kn
a-'
fo:
kn
pr
sk

—
* T
**