

Expert Coaches' Perceptions of Team Building

GORDON A. BLOOM

McGill University, Montreal, Quebec

DIANE E. STEVENS

Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario

TAMARA L. WICKWIRE

McGill University, Montreal, Quebec

To date, most team building programs in sport have assessed athletes' perceptions of improved team functioning. However, the coach plays an invaluable role in the development of the team. The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of expert coaches on the topic of team building and to create an understanding of team building strategies specific to elite sport. Focus group methodology was implemented with a group of Canadian intercollegiate coaches. Twenty-nine coaches participated in one of five focus group sessions. Six themes emerged from the analysis: (a) fundamental elements of team building, (b) team environment, (c) coach's role and characteristics, (d) team building activities, (e) lessons learned, and (f) relationship between team building/cohesion/performance. Results improved the understanding of group cohesion and team building, and specifically addressed the role of the coach in developing a cohesive team.

Cohesion has often been cited as a central and crucial element in the development of a team of people working together (Zander, 1975). Cohesion, a fundamental group property, has been defined as "a dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs" (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1997, p. 3). If cohesion is the desired final outcome, then team building is the process to facilitate its development.

Team building can be characterized as team enhancement or team improvement (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998). When team building is successful, it is assumed that team synergy is enhanced which leads to improved team performance. Historically, team building has played an important role in business and industry. A meta-analysis by Neuman, Edwards, and Raju (1989) reviewed 126 studies that utilized various organizational development methods to modify employee satisfaction and/or other attitudes. Multifaceted interventions (e.g., team building) demonstrated greater effectiveness in changing attitudes than did interventions that