Little or no empirical research has examined the pre- and postcompetition routines of coaches. The purpose of this study was to address this oversight by conducting in-depth open-ended interviews with 21 expert coaches from four team sports. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and inductively analyzed following the procedures outlined by Côté and colleagues (1993, 1995). The results indicated that coaches had set routines for themselves and their players before and after a competition. Prior to the competition, coaches prepared and mentally rehearsed their game plan, engaged in physical activity to maintain a positive focus, held a team meeting, and occupied themselves during the warm-up. Their words immediately before the game were used to stress key points. After the competition, coaches emphasized the importance of controlling their emotions and adopted different behaviors to appropriately deal with the team’s performance and outcome. A brief meeting was held to recapitulate the essential elements of the game and a detailed analysis was not presented until the next practice or meeting.

Researchers in sport psychology have studied various areas of coaching using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Earlier research generally encompassed the former method of data acquisition and analysis. For example, Chelladurai’s (1980) research on leadership in sport led to the creation of the Multidimensional Model of Coaching. This in turn generated research on other aspects of coaching, such as decision styles of coaches (Black & Weiss, 1992; Gordon, 1988), the relationship between coaches and young athletes (Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979), and the role of the coach in fostering team cohesion (Westre & Weiss, 1991).
Over the years, this quantitative research was complemented by qualitative approaches to study the confidence and competence of novice coaches (Weiss, Barber, Sisley, & Ebbeck, 1991), the attrition of female coaches from the coaching profession (Hart, Hasbrook, & Mathes, 1986), the socialization patterns of male and female coaches (Anderson & Gill, 1983), and also the career evolution of expert coaches (Schinke, Bloom, & Salmela, 1995).

Recently, researchers have begun to investigate the area of expert coaching. In a series of studies, Gould and associates surveyed a number of expert American coaches to assess issues such as coach education, coach development, and the use of psychological strategies (Gould, Giannini, Krane, & Hodge, 1990; Gould, Hodge, Peterson, & Giannini, 1989; Gould, Hodge, Peterson, & Petlichkoff, 1987). A number of recommendations were extrapolated to improve the coaching profession, as well as future research in this domain. A significant revelation was that coaches believed there were no definite set of concepts or principles to follow in their profession. They acquired most of their knowledge through their own coaching experience and from observing other successful coaches (Gould et al., 1990). Salmela (1995) examined the knowledge of expert team sport coaches and found that their early sporting and novice coaching experiences were instrumental in shaping their future operational tactics in training and competition. Although competition was the ultimate proving ground for these expert coaches, detailed cognitive strategies for performing in this environment were not addressed. In a related study, Bloom, Salmela, and Schinke (1995) investigated the methods for training future coaches and found that high-level coaches believed there was a need for a more formalized mentoring program. One major recommendation was to provide aspiring coaches with opportunities to acquire hands-on experience and observe mentors during all phases of competition.

In sum, the research of Gould and Salmela and their colleagues hinted at potential empirical insights on expert coaches. A naturalistic approach was used in several of their studies, allowing expert coaches to express and emphasize various areas of concern. However, no theoretical framework emerged for explaining which factors were most important in the coaching process.

In this regard, Côté and colleagues (Côté, Salmela, & Russell, 1995a; Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995) interviewed 17 Canadian high-performance gymnastics coaches with open-ended questions designed to explore the structure of their coaching knowledge. Through an inductive process, Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, and Russell developed a coaching model (CM) consisting of three central components of competition, organization, and training as well as three peripheral components—the gymnast’s personal characteristics and level of development, the coach’s personal characteristics, and contextual factors. The CM provided a noteworthy framework for conceptualizing the knowledge of expert coaches.

Côté, Salmela, and Russell (1995a) also provided information on the procedures followed by gymnastics coaches at the competition site, on the competition floor, and during the competition itself. However, the nature of these coaches’ perceptions of pre- and postcompetition routines was limited because of the task demands of this individual sport. In an earlier behavioral observation study of gymnastics coaches, Salmela, Petiot, Hallé, and Régnier (1981) found that their interactions with athletes were minimal during competitions, comprising fewer than 10% of their total behaviors.
Several nonempirical sources of information have alluded to the pre- and postcompetition routines of coaches. For example, Martens (1987) and Orlick (1986) provided guidelines for coaches to help themselves and their athletes prepare psychologically and deal with various competitive situations. The importance of communication was emphasized, particularly in regard to changing a game plan or dealing with a loss. Cox (1994) also alluded to certain tactics coaches used before a game, such as the team pep talk.

Martens (1987) recommended that coaches help their athletes make appropriate, constructive attributions through a general postcompetition debriefing. He also suggested that they direct this meeting based on the outcome and performance of their athletes. For example, when athletes won and played well, he recommended that coaches emphasize effort and performance and not just outcome. Secondly, when athletes won but played poorly, coaches should emphasize areas needing improvement and acknowledge those who played well and provided a solid effort. Furthermore, coaches should give themselves sufficient time to evaluate the competition and wait until the next practice to provide detailed feedback to the athletes.

Martens’ (1987) suggestions for postcompetition meetings were somewhat different for a loss. For example, when athletes lost but played well, coaches were encouraged to stress skill improvement and express satisfaction with their athletes’ effort and performance. When athletes lost and played poorly, they were advised to focus on bettering their players’ physical and psychological skills and direct discontent toward inferior effort and performance, and not toward the loss.

Other forms of nonempirical research expanded the knowledge in the area of coaching and included interviews with successful coaches (Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Wrisberg, 1990), retrospective profiles of great coaches (Mechikoff & Kozar, 1983; Mellen, 1988; Walton, 1992), and autobiographical portraits of expert coaches (Riley, 1993; Wooden, 1988). Whereas these sources briefly outlined coaching strategies and philosophies as well as methods for developing athlete self-confidence and motivation, they implicitly alluded to certain aspects of the coaches’ pre- and postcompetition routines.

For example, Pat Riley (Riley, 1993) and Bobby Knight (Mellen, 1988), two very successful basketball coaches, discussed their methods of self-preparation, ways of assessing team readiness, and philosophies guiding their pre- and postgame talks. Bobby Knight’s ritual walk with a close friend the night before a game was his preferred way to prepare. Additional information was obtained from other books written by academics who also attempted to profile successful coaches (Mechikoff & Kozar, 1983; Walton, 1992). Specifically, Mechikoff and Kozar noted that expert coaches had individualized ways of preparing their teams for competition. One example was a coach who used the media as aploy to motivate players before crucial games.

In conclusion, empirical and nonempirical sources of information on expert coaching have contributed only partial findings to the study of expert coaches. Clearly, there is a lack of research on the competition strategies of coaches. The purpose of this study was to address this gap in the literature by examining expert coaches’ perceptions of their pre- and postcompetition routines.
Method

Participants

Twenty-one expert Canadian coaches from the team sports of ice hockey (IH, \( n = 5 \)), field hockey (FH, \( n = 5 \)), basketball (BB, \( n = 6 \)) and volleyball (VB, \( n = 5 \)) were identified by their National Sport Organizations as being the most knowledgeable and respected in this country. One criterion for expertise was a minimum of 10 years or the equivalent of 10,000 hours of coaching experience. The coaches also were selected based on their win/loss percentages as well as the number of national and international elite performers they had developed at the time of selection. The sample included past and present coaches of Canadian national and university teams. They were 40 to 62 years of age, with an average of 45.5 years, and had coached at an expert level from 12 to 32 years, averaging 18.1 years.

Procedure

Each coach was interviewed by the senior researcher for one-and-a-half to three hours. Fourteen of the 21 interviews took place in the coaches’ offices before or after a training session. Of the remaining interviews, six were conducted at universities and in hotel rooms, and one at a coach’s home. The interviewer was familiar with the area of study, that is, with the coaches’ history and the nature and terminology of their sport. This was one method of ensuring the trustworthiness of the data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Interview Technique. Interviews can range on a continuum from “structured or focused” to “unstructured, elite, or exploratory.” In an unstructured approach, the research problem and questions are not formulated ahead of time which avoids forcing or guiding the subject to respond in a manner predetermined by the researcher. This type of interview gives the subjects the opportunity to stress points they believe are most important rather than rely on the investigator’s notion of relevancy (Dexter, 1970). On the other hand, “when an interview is tightly structured, it begins to approximate a questionnaire in appearance; indeed, the questionnaire might be thought of as a special form of structured interview that happens to be self-administered” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 164).

Unstructured, open-ended interviews were used in the present research. Coaches discussed their personal athletic history, evolving visions of coaching, team-building procedures, approaches to both training and competition, and reflections on improving coaching education. The interviewer had an initial understanding of these issues from past research in the coaching domain.

Patton’s (1990) interviewing approach was employed to elicit knowledge from the expert coaches. Questions were worded as precisely as possible, using jargon or terminology familiar to the participant. Second, “probing” techniques were used to redefine and elaborate on statements made in the interview, including the basic who, what, where, when, and how. For example, when discussing mental preparation, the interviewer asked the coaches to further elaborate on this by using a probe question such as: “Can you give me specific examples of ways in which you mentally prepare?”

Analysis

The unstructured interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using an inductive process of reasoning, from “the bottom-up” rather than the “top-down.”
Categories of information were not predetermined before the analysis. Côté and colleagues’ (1993, 1995b) procedures for analyzing unstructured qualitative data were used in this study, which consisted of three main steps: creating tags, creating categories, and conceptualizing them.

**Creating Tags.** The process of creating tags entailed dividing the text from the interview transcripts into “meaning units,” or separate pieces of text containing one idea, concept, or piece of information (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993). Each meaning unit was named or tagged based on its content. For the purpose of this study, only those meaning units relating to precompetition or postcompetition were used.

**Creating Categories.** Creating categories was the second stage of the analysis. It involved listing and comparing the tags, not the meaning units, created in the first phase. Similar tags were regrouped into broader categories; for example, the tags “game-day jog” and “game-day mental preparation” were regrouped with similar items into a category entitled “game-day routines of coaches,” the label given to capture the “substance of the topic” being discussed (Côté et al., 1993).

**Conceptualizing Categories.** The final stage of analysis involved regrouping the categories identified in the preceding stage into broader conceptual ones. This step was similar to the previous one, except it was done at a higher and more abstract level of analysis (Côté, Salmela, & Russell, 1995b). The data were examined until a saturation of understanding was reached and no new categories of information emerged at all levels (Côté et al., 1995b).

**Establishing Trustworthiness.** Suggestions forwarded by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (1990) were followed in the present study to ensure the integrity of the analysis. Credibility was established by having a knowledgeable researcher conduct the interviews. The participants were probed to ensure their reports were complete and understood. Furthermore, participants were always invited to return to any issue or idea they felt was important or needed further clarification. Moreover, the interview transcripts were returned to the participants before the data analysis took place so they could authenticate the content, a process entitled member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Peer debriefing also was used to establish trustworthiness, by which members of the research team met regularly to discuss all aspects of the analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Two individuals with experience in qualitative research acted as debriefers and judges at all levels of the tagging process. They randomly examined 25% of the meaning units, whereby a list of all the tags was provided and the tag best representing each meaning unit was individually selected. The judges discussed individual results and discrepancies until a consensus was reached. The same process was undertaken to verify the appropriateness of the grouping of tags within the broader categories.

**Results**

The data in the present study (Table 1) consisted of 244 meaning units (MU), representing 13% of the total MU identified from all 21 interviews. Of these 244 MU, 144 or 59% dealt with coaches’ precompetition routines, and 100 or 41% related to postcompetition ones.

Within the precompetition category, two lower level categories emerged: game-day routines for the coach (MU = 59 or 24.2%), and those for the team...
Table 1  Number of Meaning Units Per Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th># of MU</th>
<th>% of total MU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Precompetition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game-day routines for coaches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-site routines</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-site routines</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game-day routines for the team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-site routines</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-site routines</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postcompetition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches’ emotions and behaviors</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team meeting</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game evaluation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(MU = 85 or 34.8%). Both of these categories were further divided into more specific off-site and on-site activities. The postcompetition category comprised three lower level categories: coaches’ emotions and behaviors (MU = 58 or 23.8%), the team meeting (MU = 20 or 8.2%), and game evaluation (MU = 22 or 9%). The first section will address coaches’ precompetition routines.

**Precompetition**

*Game-Day Routines for Coaches.* Coaches’ game-day activities occurred both off-site (MU = 20 or 11.9%) and on-site (MU = 30 or 12.3%). They involved getting physically and mentally ready for competition and relaying the game plan and strategies. Some coaches stated that in earlier stages of their careers, their primary concern was preparing athletes for competition. However, as they gained experience, they recognized the importance of spending as much time, if not more, preparing themselves:

As coaches, we do a lot of preparation for our players, but we sometimes forget to prepare ourselves. I think that’s the biggest thing I have learned in the last 5 or 6 years of coaching. (Ice hockey coach)

There is a certain time I go crazy in the middle of the day and I like to do my own thing. I watch the video before the players because analyzing is a good skill of mine. I need to feel prepared. I need to have some things written down for myself, that is, what I see the game plan to be and what I am going to do as the game progresses. (Volleyball coach)
Coaches had individualized routines to maximize readiness on game-day. Nine reported setting aside time early in the morning to go for a walk or run, a way of escaping distractions to focus on the upcoming match:

I don’t know that I do anything special to prepare myself. I’ll talk to the assistant coaches and make sure we are on the same wave length. Sometimes it is tough to wait for competition, so I’ll go for a run in the morning and think about what we are going to do and how I am going to approach the athletes. (Field hockey coach)

I do a lot of things, like a daily run. On game-day that run is very important to me because it is my quiet time—no phones, nothing. Just me, and maybe my dog because he doesn’t talk, he just runs! (Ice hockey coach)

On-site activities included reviewing or mentally rehearsing the game plans, scouting the opposition, retreating to a quiet place to prepare for the game, and dealing with athletes’ concerns. Coaches arrived at the competition site well before the start of the competition. Their on-site routines were once again individualized and often adhered to meticulously. For example, certain coaches retired to their coaching room to review video tapes of both their team and the opposition. Although their game plan was formalized, they sought extra information they might be able to relay to their players before the game. Assistant coaches or other support staff members often watched the films with them. Other coaches preferred to relax by watching videos unrelated to sport, listening to music, or talking with nonteam members.

Another important part of their routines was mental rehearsal. More than 90% of the coaches took time during the day to review in their minds common scenarios for the upcoming match, including how they would react to possible situations such as key matchups, late game substitutions, or poor officiating:

My biggest problem is emotional control during games, so I have to mentally rehearse all the situations and decide in advance how I am going to react. When I see who is refereeing, I walk away from the bench and visualize those people making the usual screwups that they make and how I am going to react. I have to do that or I would be out of control. (Basketball coach)

My ritual was always having a rest in the afternoon. We would have our meetings and then I would probably think about who I was going to use against whom. Also, if somebody got hurt, who would I replace him with. I tried to visualize what might happen, different scenarios; if this line is not going well, who would I move into that position? So I would rehearse and then rest. (Ice hockey coach)

Game-Day Routines for the Team. It was important for the coaches to prepare not only themselves on the day of a competition but also their team. All had set off-site (MU = 14 or 5.7%) and on-site (MU = 71 or 29.1%) routines for their players. Team activities were carefully mapped out so athletes could think about the game rather than the pregame meeting or warm-up. Routines varied according to the sport and the philosophy of both the coaches and their players.
However, common elements that emerged were having a morning meal or warm-up off-site and a set time for taping and stretching on-site:

In preparing for games in the NHL, there is almost always a routine the players go through and almost every team does it. You have a morning skate, a video to discuss your opponent, a team meal, and then players rest in the afternoon. (Ice hockey coach)

There has to be a routine set an hour before where everyone is dressed, with ankle supports and everything else on. About 15 minutes before that time, the players chose to have a team meeting with no coaches. They talk about their attitude and how they want to play and be supportive of one another. (Volleyball coach)

The pregame talk was a very important part of the team’s on-site routines, as all coaches allocated time to speak with their athletes before the warm-up. The purpose of the pregame talk was to briefly review the game plan and not to teach new tactics. Coaches feared that overloading their athletes with new information would distract them and inhibit their performance:

I do very little teaching. I have to watch myself because I am always trying to think of something I could teach them. I have to watch that I don’t teach too much the day of the competition. (Basketball coach)

Usually I try to remind them of a half a dozen things. A short review, like don’t forget we have to serve tough if we are going to have a chance. (Volleyball coach)

Another procedure was the pregame warm-up, which coaches stressed should be done in a cohesive and professional manner. Of interest was the emphasis they placed on the mental preparation of their players at this time:

I think the warm-up is very much a part of the preparation, and the players have to understand that it involves two types of things. It’s a physical warm-up with stretching and a chance to loosen up the body to avoid injury. More importantly, it’s a mental gear to get you back to the level you were at the last time you played. I hope that while the athletes are warming up they are going through in their minds a little bit of what they are going to do in the game. (Ice hockey coach)

A related area was the coaches’ activities during the warm-up, one of which was actively participating in the warm-up, a procedure mainly followed by field hockey coaches:

We have a very set warm-up. I deal with the goalies and the other coach does this little game to get them going. (Field hockey coach)

The most common procedure adopted by coaches during the warm-up was scouting the opposition:

Warm-up is one of the things I do. While my players are out service receiving, I am watching the other team. I watch the setter’s tendencies, what sets
they’re practicing, and where the hitters are hitting most regularly. (Volleyball coach)

Finally, one coach took a very distant and passive approach and completely avoided the warm-up:

I usually don’t like to go out and watch the warm-up because I am never satisfied with the way [they] do it. I would rather not watch and get upset. I usually stay in; sometimes I go to sleep and take a 10-minute nap. (Basketball coach)

A number of meaning units in the precompetition category (MU = 14 or 5.7%) pertained to the coaches’ final words to athletes before they left the locker room. Many individuals inside and outside of sport still feel that an inspirational pep talk is the most effective way of getting a team ready for a game. Although some of the participants thought it was necessary on certain occasions, most of the time they preferred to adopt an even-tempered approach and provided their athletes with a few short reminders:

After the warm-up I speak to the players, sometimes after they’ve had a little time to cool down and a few minutes before they go on the ice. I use some very quick-hitting reminders and I try to outline three things. If I feel it is necessary, I will say something very motivational. (Ice hockey coach)

I think in coaching we often believe that we have to get our athletes all frenzied. We cannot whip people into a lather over a full season and get all the juices flowing day in and day out. (Field hockey coach)

In sum, all coaches adhered to individualized precompetition routines. They acknowledged the need to prepare themselves for competition, and also spent a great deal of time and effort preparing their team. Events were mapped out in ways players could optimize their mental preparation over the day of the competition. In a final attempt to get them ready for the game, coaches used a calm but direct approach.

**Postcompetition**

Expert coaches attempted to follow certain procedures before competitions; in a similar manner, they had a number of routines they adhered to after competitions. Specifically, three categories of information emerged from the analysis: coaches’ emotions and behaviors (MU = 58 or 23.8%), the team meeting (MU = 20 or 8.2%), and the game evaluation (MU = 22 or 9.0%).

**Coaches’ Emotions and Behaviors.** Coaches emphasized the importance of controlling emotions after a game. They suggested that the ability to control them evolved with coaching experience:

The biggest thing is not to get too excited about losing or winning; try and keep it even. The more you are in coaching, the more you realize this. Your whole career cannot be living in these high and lows. You start living them for a while and then you become a basket case. You can’t let the team get too high about winning or losing. Some losses are a bit more painful than others,
but the biggest thing is to find out why you lost and deal with it. (Basketball coach)

I think it’s trying to stay on an even keel and not going up and down with performance. You’re striving for an even professional, mature approach. You can’t let emotion carry you all the time because emotion is special. (Basketball coach)

Coaches discovered strategies or behaviors to help them deal with emotions, such as going for a walk or releasing frustrations by talking to assistant coaches. Often, people forget that in team sports, coaches also take an active role in the game:

I can talk to my assistant coach and go, ‘argh!’ We get to bitch. I said let’s get it all out because we can’t do it in front of the players. When I am in front of them, I want to say something useful. It doesn’t mean I never get mad at them because if you’re always calm and in control, they don’t like that either. (Volleyball coach)

It is a time to reflect with the coaches. It has to happen quickly. If I’m upset, I have to vent some of my frustrations, usually behind closed doors. (Ice hockey coach)

If the game doesn’t go well, I have learned to go for a walk or count to one thousand before talking to them. In other words, try not to make the talk just emotional, try to make it constructive. (Volleyball coach)

Team Meeting. Coaches seemed to have personalized ways of dealing with emotions after a competition, however, one common procedure emerged: they all had a brief postgame meeting with their team. The meeting was kept short because they knew their players would be, or as one coach mentioned, should be, mentally exhausted, and a prolonged meeting would be ineffective:

Winning or losing, we always have a team meeting. Right after the game we go in but not necessarily to tear down the game point by point. (Volleyball coach)

We are not ones for prolonged postgame talks. I think you have to bring them together win or lose. Win, it is easy. Lose it is a little more difficult because there is so much anger and disappointment in you. I don’t think it is the time to have a self-analysis; as a result, we never have kids blaming other kids. If you get into a discussion, the kids might say things they later would regret. (Field hockey coach)

The duration of the meeting varied for each coach, but most met immediately after the game. The content depended as much on the outcome as on their perception of the team’s performance. If the team won, coaches usually let the players savor the win and waited for the next practice to provide the “win some” perspective. Nonetheless, they still raised a few points they wanted their players to consider before the next practice or meeting:

I’ll always go in and talk to the players. Some nights we’ll win and not play very well. Basically, I let them celebrate the win. I only talk about the win
because that’s what they’re there for. Maybe we didn’t win pretty, but we won. We got our two points and, for that particular night, I want the guys to think that they have accomplished something. (Ice hockey coach)

After losses, the focus of the meeting varied considerably. When the team lost but coaches felt they had played well, the outcome was dealt with constructively, and the positive aspects of the game were reinforced. For several coaches, the ability to adopt this approach in the face of a “good” loss was developed with experience. It was thought that coming down hard on the athletes in these instances might lessen the impact of their talk after they lost and played poorly:

I always tell my players that if we lose and play well, I don’t have a problem with that. Sometimes we can be beat because the opposition played better. (Volleyball coach)

I am certainly a believer that there is a time when you need to come down hard and there is a time when you shouldn’t. I think as coaches, we have to evaluate the team and its effort. It is always easier to come down hard on your team when you know the effort was not there. But it’s when they have given you all they’ve got that you have to realize that maybe it is up to you as a coach to find ways to improve in some areas. (Ice hockey coach)

In instances where the team lost and played poorly, coaches had a harder time dealing with the situation. They addressed their team with a few short comments but rarely provided a detailed analysis of the game. Coaches also were careful to avoid belittling individual players:

If we lose, sometimes you basically have to go in and s... on them because they haven’t performed very well and they deserve it. I always try to say, ‘These are the negative points, these are the positive points, and this is what we achieved.’ I try to leave on a fairly high note and then bang, bang, this is what is going to happen the next day. (Volleyball coach)

Game Evaluation. One other important postcompetition procedure was the game evaluation. All coaches assessed games within a day of their completion, using a number of information resources, including video equipment, statistical information, and assistant coaches. They stressed the need to thoroughly analyze all aspects of the game before discussing it with their athletes:

I want to make sure I see the game film, I want to sleep on it. I don’t want to say something that is not necessary and I don’t want to repeat myself at the next practice. (Field hockey coach)

I always wanted to be sure. Although some of the things are obvious, sometimes when you watch the video, you realize it was somebody else. So I always wanted to look at the video before I came in with what I thought was wrong. (Ice hockey coach)

Coaches preferred to discuss the game with their athletes at the next practice or meeting. Four of the expert coaches also sought input from their athletes at this time:
The next day is usually a matter of reviewing the game plan. This is what we said we were going to do, why couldn’t we do it? Or, what worked and what didn’t work? We get input from the athletes because at this point it is happening to them. This is where you have to hand it over if you want them to bring information back. (Field hockey coach)

In general, the content of the postgame practice focused on elements of the previous game. More specifically, coaches shaped it to address areas of the game plan that were poorly executed:

I have to react to how we played in the last couple of games. They know if our power play was anemic for two games, we’ll be working on the power play in practice. ‘We’re working on the power play today because we had three critical points in the last two games where we could have put games away. Here’s where it broke down, and here’s what we’re going to do to work on it.’ (Ice hockey coach)

Regardless of the outcome, coaches felt it was important to use every game as a learning experience to make appropriate changes to their precompetition and competition plans, to refine the content of their training sessions and, ultimately, to enhance the quality and consistency of their team’s performance:

In competition, winning and losing has more to do with the execution of performance principles than it does with the final score. For instance, we analyze a game the same way whether we won or lost. The feedback we give the athletes has nothing to do with points, it has to do with execution. We say these are the things we wanted to do, this is what we did well, and this is what we didn’t do well. We played poorly for these reasons and didn’t focus on these things like we said we would. (Basketball coach)

In sum, results of this study have shown there are a number of routines expert coaches used following a competition. They took the results of the game as seriously as their athletes and adopted strategies to help control their emotions. The postgame team meeting provided them with the opportunity to relay some information to the athletes and express their feelings, however, detailed analyses were generally left to the next practice. Finally, regardless of the outcome, coaches attempted to use every game as a learning experience to improve performance and make appropriate changes to their coaching plans.

Discussion

Expert coaches of team sports invested a great deal of time and energy preparing both themselves and their team for a competition. It was found that although they each had their own perceptions and strategies on how to perform their duties as coaches, they subscribed to remarkably common routines that enabled them to accomplish the tasks leading up to a competition and those ensuing after it.

Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, and Russell (1995) recently published a mental model of coaching, which resulted from their study with expert gymnastics coaches. Competition was a major category listed in the model but, due to the nature of the research objectives and the sport investigated, information pertaining
to coaches’ pre- and postcompetition routines was limited, only representing 6\% of the data, whereas in the present study, it accounted for 13\% of the total database. This highlights the complexity and importance of team sport coaches’ activities before and after competition. Results of this study were similar to those presented by Côté and colleagues in that competition routines were an extension of the work done in the other two primary areas of coaching—organization and training. One example of coaches’ precompetition activities in the present study was communicating the game plan to the team, which reflected the work carried out during previous training sessions. Their postcompetition routines also affected other aspects of coaching. If a team played poorly and the postgame evaluation revealed defensive play as the main problem, this in turn affected the coaches’ weekly and daily planning for training. Although discrepancies concerning the number of meaning units related to pre- and postcompetition strategies exist between the two studies, links can be made between the competition, training, and organizational tasks coaches execute in both individual and team sport environments.

In addition to the similarities found with the coaching model, the expert coaches’ routines corresponded to other researchers’ suggestions (Cox, 1994; Martens, 1987; Orlick, 1986). Martens suggested that coaches help their athletes develop a sound pre-event routine. Coaches in the present study revealed they did this by ensuring athletes arrived at the competition site together, adhered to a standardized set of locker room routines, and took part in a cohesive warm-up before a match. The players’ mental preparation also was emphasized throughout the day of the competition.

Expert coaches also put a great deal of emphasis on their own preparation, an area that until this point, has not been empirically examined. Coaches’ personal routines on game-day included spending time alone in the morning, preparing and mentally rehearsing the game plan, arriving early at the competition site, and keeping busy during the warm-up.

Martens (1987) and Cox (1994) discouraged the use of the traditional pep talk as a pregame strategy to get the team ready to perform. Their reasons mirrored those of the expert coaches in this study, who revealed that these theatrics before a game were often inappropriate because athletes had various needs and different arousal levels with which to contend. Coaches adopted an even-tempered approach in their final address before the game, recapitulating three or four of the most important points stressed in the previous week’s preparation.

Many of the expert coaches’ routines after a competition were comparable to those suggested by Martens (1987). Coaches raised the importance of taking time to regain their composure before having a team meeting with their athletes. The content and focus of the meeting depended on both the outcome and the coaches’ perceptions of the team’s performance. Martens’ recommendations were contingent upon whether the team won or lost, and played well or poorly. When the team lost and played poorly, Martens suggested focusing on the improvement of the players’ physical and psychological skills. However, coaches in the present study said it was best to say very little because most athletes were not in a receptive mode and they themselves were worried about saying something they would later regret. They held back their natural tendency to correct any flaws or errors detected during the game until the next training session.

A synopsis of nonempirical research on expert coaching was provided earlier in the article. These sources presented original information, some of which
implicitly and explicitly alluded to coaches’ roles and routines before and after competition. While there are several books and articles on expert coaching, there is a need for more empirical research in this area to complement the existing sources. Using Côté et al.’s (1995) CM as a framework to conduct these studies is recommended, particularly if the dynamics between competition, training, and organization are examined.

More precisely, it is suggested that the CM be used to investigate the routines of coaches of other team, individual, and professional sports. Hypothetically, their pre- and postcompetition routines could differ significantly, as coach-athlete relationships and external pressures are quite unique in these sporting contexts. It also would be interesting to examine athletes’ perceptions of their coaches pre- and postcompetition routines. Furthermore, videotaping coaches throughout the day of a competition would be a valid form of triangulation that would add to the richness of the interview data. In sum, it is hoped that future studies will pay further attention to this important area of coaching. Providing coaches with opportunities to share their knowledge and experiences can only lead to a more complete picture of this fascinating profession.

References


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