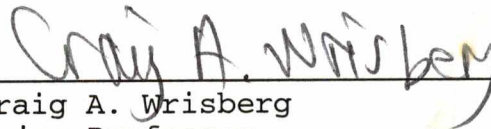


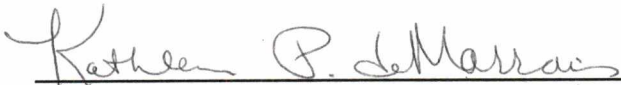
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Gregory A. Dale entitled "The Experience of Elite Decathlon Participants During Their Most Memorable Performance: Overcoming the Distractions." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Education.



Craig A. Wrisberg
Major Professor

We have read the dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

THE EXPERIENCE OF ELITE DECATHLON PARTICIPANTS DURING THEIR
MOST MEMORABLE PERFORMANCE: OVERCOMING THE DISTRACTIONS

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Gregory A. Dale

August, 1994

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my best friend and my wife, Cammie, who has challenged and supported me in her role as editor throughout this process. She has showered me with unconditional love and understanding that will never be forgotten. It is dedicated to my wonderful parents who have always been there for me despite the many miles that separate us. They both have sacrificed so that I may realize my dreams. I also dedicate this dissertation to my brothers, Mike and Chris. I think about them each day. Finally, I dedicate it to Dr. Jack Clifton whose friendship I have cherished and whose overwhelming support I will never forget. Thanks everyone.

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I would like to thank the phenomenological research group, who provided valuable insight and assistance with the data. Finally, I would like to thank the participants of this study. Without their willingness to participate and trust in me, this dissertation could not have been written.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of elite decathlon participants during their most memorable or meaningful performance. To describe the experience of these athletes, phenomenological interviews were conducted with each participant. This methodology was chosen because of its emphasis on the participant as expert. Much like the process of the athlete-sport psychology consultant interaction in a mental training consultation, the phenomenological interview consists of an original question directing the participant to describe a particular experience which is then followed by questions designed to help the interviewer make sure she or he has understood what the athlete has said during the course of the interview. Participants in this study consisted of seven elite decathletes, currently competing at the national and international level. One interview was conducted with each participant and lasted, on the average, from one and a half to two hours. Four major themes emerged from these interviews: (1) "The 1500" (2) Distractions (3) Awareness of a Need to Recognize and/or React to Distractions and (4) Focusing. Athletes in this study were aware of "the 1500" to varying degrees throughout the competition, and it became progressively more figural for them as the competition proceeded toward the final event; the 1500 itself. These

athletes experienced several distractions during the course of the competition and several of these distractions were discussed in more detail: Lack of Preparation, Level of Talent, Fatigue, A Bad Event, Fear, Pain, Weather, Awareness of Others, and Camaraderie. Participants also described having an ongoing awareness or "need" to deal with or react to distractions as they occurred. Sub themes in this category consist of Getting Rid of Distractions and The Need to Focus. Once athletes were aware of a specific distraction they reported having specific strategies to help narrow their focus to the task of performing optimally in each event. Sub themes of Focusing include: Imaging/Visualizing, Being Aware of Keys, Competing Only Against the Self, Confidence (Proper Training), Consistency, and Camaraderie. Results of the present study were related both to peak performance in sport and to more general issues in the phenomenological description of the lived body and with the phenomenological experience of other people in competition. Finally, implications for coaches and sport psychology consultants as well as implications for future research were discussed.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

I think of the decathlon as a big, high, brick wall that nobody is ever going to be able to climb. It's cold and heartless. It has no mercy. It's awesome and scary. It will knock you down so fast. Nobody ever beats the decathlon. You might set a record and kick the hell out of it one day, but you know that it'll always be there, standing there, waiting for you to try again, telling you, "Okay, you son of gun, try and get me this time." You've got to play by it's rules. It's very regimented, right down the line. You make one slip, and its got you. Just one mistake and it tells you, "To hell with you, this is all the points you are going to get." (Jenner & Finch, 1977, p. 4).

As one might surmise from the description given by Bruce Jenner after he won the gold medal in the decathlon competition at the Montreal Olympic games in 1976, the decathlon is a grueling competition. It is comprised of ten different track and field events contested over a two day period that tests an individual's endurance, strength, skill, and personality. The events are sequenced so the athletes compete in five events each day. The first day's events are the 100-meter dash, long jump, shot put, high jump, and the 400-meter dash. The second day's events include the 110-meter hurdles, discus throw, pole vault, javelin throw, and the 1500-meter run. Scoring for the decathlon is based on a scoring table that awards a specific number of points for times in the running events and distances in the field events. Final standings are based on the total accumulation

of points and the athlete who has accumulated the most points at the end of the ten events is declared the winner.

The decathlon has been called the most difficult of athletic events. Some might argue that the marathon or triathlon competitions might be more difficult, but decathlon participants experience a unique challenge that individual or three sport athletes such as triathletes do not have to contend with when preparing for and participating in competition. Decathletes must be able to shift their focus from one event to the next with varying strategies.

Zarnowski (1989, p.6) quotes 1968 Olympic gold medalist Bill Toomey in reference to this challenge:

But the real problem is getting up mentally for each event. To prepare yourself, to change your attitude as a person to what you are doing. When you are throwing the shot you are not a long jumper anymore. You are almost a super-schizophrenic. You are a giant shot-putter when you are throwing the shot. In the high jump, you are like a, well, a ballet type.

Jenner & Finch (1977) expand on this unique challenge by providing an elaborate description of what the decathlon experience is like.

Perhaps no other athletic event taxes the mind as completely as the decathlon. Surely none imposes such stress for so long a time. The time of actual competition is relatively short, probably less than a half hour. But there is a minimum of 30 minutes' rest between events, and large fields of competitors mean long waits between attempts in the high jump and pole vault. From the first heat of the 100 meters on the morning of the first day to the last heat of the 1500 the evening of the second, the competitors are on the track at least fifteen hours. It is not an ideal

spectator sport. But that pace is precisely why the competition is so taxing. There is time, too much time, for an athlete to dwell on the event that he has put behind him and the events to come. He can ponder the scores, replay in his mind his successes and failures so far. There is much working time for doubt and fear. As the athlete sits on the grass waiting his turn, irritations can be magnified, apprehensions can swell, doubt can gnaw away at confidence. To keep your mind on the job at hand and yet free from doubt is a formidable task (p. 21).

These vivid images described by Jenner and Toomey are based on experiences they have had while competing in the event. There is a wealth of information to be gained from descriptions such as these as well as from other athletes who have attained an elite level.

Even though there has been a recent increase in the number of studies investigating the subjective experiences of athletes involved in sport (e.g., Cohn, 1991; Ecklund, 1991; Ecklund, Gould, & Jackson 1993; Gould, Ecklund, & Jackson, 1992; Hanson, 1992; Hemery, 1986; Jackson, 1992; McCaffrey & Orlick, 1989; Newman, 1992; Orlick & Partington, 1988; Scanlan, Ravizza, & Stein, 1989; Weiss, Barber, Sisley, & Ebbeck, 1991), a majority of the research in the field of sport psychology still relies on the traditional scientific method of objectivity and subsequently affords little attention to the personal experiences of the athlete. Experience is often seen as secondary, given little consideration in the literature and, as Jackson (1992) indicates, generally neglected.

It seems only natural that in a field such as sport psychology where a greater emphasis is placed on individualizing mental training programs (Gould, Tammen, Murphy, & May, 1989; Halliwell, 1990; Newburg, 1992; Orlick, 1989; Ravizza, 1990), the personal experience of athletes should be given more attention. Doug Newburg (1992, p. 19) quotes Ken Ravizza, a well respected applied sport psychologist as saying,

We value the athlete's experience. The information we need to teach must come out of the athlete. I am merely a facilitator to help bring out what works to take them as close as possible to their dreams. Athletes, however, might not always know what is inside for them or what it takes to get them to the goal. My expertise needs to be tailored to the needs and experience of the athlete.

For many of us in the field of sport psychology the traditional scientific paradigm is the only method in which one may conduct "pure" research because it supposedly allows one to be objective and a non-influencing factor in research. Consequently the experience of the athlete has not been considered a viable source of information. However, as Locke (1989, p. 4) indicates, so long as social science is done by people and not by sanitized robots, research must be value-bound and the notion of detached objectivity must be regarded, at best, as an illusion.

The traditional scientific method of inquiry is founded on the assumptions of an objective world which has order independent of human perceptions. Researchers who follow

this method of inquiry seek to gain predictive explanatory knowledge of the external world and, to this end, construct generalizations, theories, and laws (Hatch, 1985). According to Valle, King, & Halling (1989), there are three criteria required for using the scientific method: 1) the phenomenon must be observable; 2) the phenomenon must be measurable; and 3) the phenomenon must lend itself to verification by other observers. These criteria suggest that studying human behavior that is quantifiable, observable and open to verification by independent observers is the only valid approach to scientific research (Knaack, 1984). The quantitative researcher typically employs experimental designs to reduce error, bias, and other variability that is seen as potential influences on the results of the study. There is an attempt to determine a cause-and-effect relationship, or what behaviorists might refer to as a stimulus-response relationship.

Rainer Martens (1987b) in an article entitled, "Science, Knowledge, and Sport Psychology" provided the field with its first real challenge to the use of traditional scientific methodology. He emphasized the importance of adopting a new paradigm, termed the heuristic paradigm, which recognizes the folly of objectivity and places the researcher at the center of the research process (Hanson & Newburg, 1992). Kuhn (1962) indicates that a paradigm is a way of looking at the world and the way one looks at the world determines the types

of questions one asks and the answers one looks for to those questions. The heuristic paradigm emphasizes the importance of idiographic research to learn more about the experience of individuals rather than on nomothetic research where larger, often random samples are studied to promote generalizability. This qualitative research paradigm Martens proposed for sport psychology created quite a controversy in the field and provided others who felt the same way he did the courage to begin emphasizing the importance of qualitative investigation in a field where human phenomena were being studied.

Qualitative research has its roots in a variety of academic disciplines, reflecting an enormous range of philosophical orientations, methodological approaches, and studies of various magnitudes. These various qualitative research methods allow researchers to investigate the personal experience of individuals. Burns and Grove (1979) define qualitative research as research that utilizes an alternative to the positivist paradigm. In this approach words are the data, a primarily inductive approach to data analysis is used, and theory development is the outcome of data analysis. Locke (1989) defines qualitative research as a systematic empirical strategy for answering questions about people in a bounded context. It is a way to answer the question, "What is going on here?"

Qualitative researchers do not contend that qualitative methods should replace quantitative methods because it is

widely recognized that there is a significant place in sport for measuring and quantifying performance. But, the contention is that the methods of orthodox science are too limited for the study of human behavior and experience (Martens, 1987b; Valle et al., 1989). The methodology we choose to study a phenomenon should not dictate the questions we ask; rather the questions we seek to answer should dictate the methodology we utilize.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to arrive at an accurate description of elite decathlon participants' experience during their "most meaningful or memorable" performance. To obtain an accurate description of this experience a qualitative interview methodology was used. Specifically, the phenomenological interview which is designed to engage participants in a dialogue designed to open up aspects of their experience that might not typically be reflected upon was the mode of inquiry (Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1993). As Merleau-Ponty (1962) states, the dialogue with the other brings meaning into existence precisely because the dialogue "concerns us, catches us indirectly, seduces us, trails us along, transforms us into the other and her/him unto us." The phenomenological interview is almost an inevitable procedure for attaining a rigorous and significant description of the world of everyday

human experience as it is lived and described by specific individuals in specific circumstances (Pollio et al., 1993).

Phenomenology is a method of investigating the meaning of human experience that was developed by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). It was developed and later joined with the philosophy of existence proposed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and together, existentialism and phenomenology seek to understand how an individual perceives her/his world. Existential phenomenology is a paradigm that blends the philosophy of existentialism and the methods of phenomenology (Valle et al., 1989). This results in a holistic psychology in which humans are not viewed as dualistic and seeks to gain a first person description of experience (Giorgi, 1970). Rather than viewing the human being as an object with an existence separate from the world, persons are viewed as always a being-in-the-world. It is through the world that the very meaning of the person's existence emerges, both for himself or herself and for others. Existential phenomenology, described as a revolt against the modern tendencies to view humans as object rather than subject, investigates such phenomenon as consciousness, being, and body awareness (Inoue, 1984).

Although there are several examples of interview methods in the philosophy of sport literature, the phenomenological interview is not a method that has been utilized to any extent in the sport psychology literature. Therefore, a

secondary purpose of this study was to investigate the applicability of the phenomenological interview for researchers in the field of applied sport psychology.

Definition of Terms

Existential Phenomenology. A philosophical discipline that seeks to understand the events of human existence in a way that is free of the presuppositions of our cultural heritage, especially philosophical dualism, as much as this is possible (Valle et al., 1989, p.6). Existential phenomenology means a return "to the things themselves" and its central focus is embodied consciousness: a return to awareness of our embodied being (Inoue, 1984, p.8).

Lived Body. The lived body is one which is viewed as immediately experienced in as having involvement in the world; (i.e., in sport activities). This term is also referred to as embodied consciousness and integrated body, both of which represent oneness or total being (Inoue, 1984, p.8).

Elite athlete. An elite athlete is one who excels in his or her particular event or sport. Often, an elite athlete is someone who competes successfully at the national and/or international level.

Cartesian philosophy. A scientific philosophy based on the writings of Rene Descarte. It assumes that there is a single reality of the world for everyone. He also proposed the idea

of the body and mind as a dual system with the body seen as a tool for the (higher order) mind to use in the world. The body was also viewed as a machine in which its movements and actions could be objectified. According to Meier (1975), Descarte indicated the mind has no extension, no visual appearance, and is not observable by any of the senses.

Intentionality. Intentionality addresses the ongoing dimension of our consciousness; namely that we are always in relation to that which is beyond us (Valle et al., 1989). According to Merleau-Ponty (1962) intentionality extends our whole bodily being, the way a person walks or carries her/himself or speaks, to that person's continual relationship to his or her surroundings. Valle et al.(1989) expand on this notion by providing the idea of intentionality according to Zaner (1964). Zaner indicates that we have two poles in intentionality: a) the noetic (i.e., the subjective, the perceiving), and b) the noematic (i.e., the objective, the perceived).

Idiographic research. Research that is conducted in an in-depth manner with one person. It is typically utilized in qualitative research when a researcher intends to study the experience of an individual. It has been argued that this is the most appropriate manner in which to conduct research in applied sport psychology when attempting to determine personal experience (Martens, 1979; Hanson & Newburg, 1992).

Nomothetic research. Research that compares differences between groups to arrive at generalizations or abstractions about people. It is opposite to idiographic research and is utilized mainly in traditional quantitative research.

Inductive analysis. The process of beginning with the data and working toward categories of analysis instead of having a-priori categories and relating them to a theory. In this type of analysis, the researcher is not presumed to be the expert on the phenomena; rather the person providing the information is the expert.

Phenomenology. According to Husserl, as translated by Gerber (1964) and Silverman (1980), phenomenology is a scientific method which intends to describe the what and how of ontological manifestations to the conscious self. As such, it involves a return to things as they appear in original experience prior to systematization and classifications of scientific discourse.

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions were made in reference to this study:

1. The personal experiences of elite athletes are important in understanding the nature of "memorable or meaningful" performances.
2. The athletes in this study were able to effectively articulate their experiences of the decathlon.

3. The phenomenological interview is a valid method for attaining a description of personal experiences.

4. The participants in this study reported their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings as accurately as they could.

Limitations of the Study

This investigation faced several potential limitations. First, even though the athletes in this study were asked to describe their "most memorable or meaningful" performance, the experience might have occurred several years prior to the study, possibly making it more difficult to recall a vivid image of their experience. Second, the number of participants in the study was small. This was due to the fact that the participants lived in different areas of the country and the researcher had to travel to meet each of the participants. It was not economically feasible to include other participants. Third, even though all possible precautions were taken to identify themes that characterized each participant's experience, complete identification might have been impossible.

Significance of the Study

As researchers in the field of applied sport psychology we must stop and take notice of the methods we use to learn more about athletes and what contributes to their success.

Individual differences in the way sport is experienced must not be disregarded because in order for us to be effective consultants and assist athletes in developing systematic plans for competition, we must listen to and learn from their experiences. The significance of the present study is based on the assumption that the athlete who has had a particular experience in the decathlon at a very high level is the expert. As Ravizza (1993) indicates, athletes are the real experts and the best performers have knowledge, insight and experience. Such insights have spearheaded Ravizza's approach to mental training with athletes and coaches. To allow elite athletes the opportunity to describe their experience during "meaningful or memorable" performances by way of phenomenological dialogue, provides a wealth of information to coaches, athletes and sport psychology consultants that might otherwise be untapped.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As Martens (1987b) noted, in the field of sport psychology we must seriously question the significance of objectivity in terms of our attempts to understand human behavior. He suggests that traditional science has been portrayed as a gentle but firm hand that holds a butterfly without crushing it. For the physical sciences, such science has elegantly caressed many butterflies, but for the study of human behavior it has nearly annihilated the species (p.34).

Based upon this notion, the initial section of this review includes a contrast of the traditional scientific philosophy of human phenomena with an existential phenomenological approach to the same topic. Within this contrast I hope to show how the existential phenomenological perspective is a much more useful way to view human behavior and experience. Upon laying this foundation, I will provide an overview of the traditional dualist conception of body (and mind) and demonstrate how it differs from the existential phenomenological concept of the lived body.

The next section in the review of the literature provides an overview of different types of interview styles utilized in qualitative research. This section was included to contrast the various types and to show how traditional interview procedures are too restrictive when one is

attempting to describe human experience. Alternatives are provided along with the strengths and weaknesses of each type.

Following the section on interview types is a section on literature in sport. Studies from the fields of sport psychology are included to provide some background as to how qualitative methods have been used in describing various experiences in sport, including peak or top performances.

Contrast Between Traditional Scientific Philosophy and Existential Phenomenology

When researchers and practitioners seek to determine what there is to know about a person they often conclude there are two quite different aspects; the outward, observable side of others, otherwise referred to as their physical behavior, and the inward unobservable side which might include emotions and sensations, otherwise referred to as the personal side of experience (Valle et al., 1989). In the development of psychology, behavior and experience came to be viewed as two different entities and a clear conceptual distinction was made between them. Behavior was viewed as the outward, observable aspect of human life and experience was viewed as the inward, unobservable side (Valle et al., 1989). This pattern of thought derives from the Cartesian dualism of subjective mind and objective body. The subjective was conceptualized as experienced solely by the

individual having the experience and was incapable of being quantified by objective measures thereby making it unavailable to rigorous study and evaluation. If one is interested in studying human phenomena, however, this paradigm seems too restrictive since it recognizes and investigates only one half of the behavior-experience distinction. In addition, it essentially asks only "why" something happens, not "what" it is like or "what" is the nature of a certain phenomena. (Valle et al., 1989).

Thompson, Locander & Pollio (1989, p. 134) offer a metaphor to describe the Cartesian view of human phenomena; that of the machine. Within this metaphor a theoretical system is implied in which all free dynamics in the system are restricted by constraints taking the form of principles and laws (Kohler, 1969). Pepper (1942) noted that certain assumptions follow this metaphor:

1. Properties of the machine, such as psychological ones, can be calibrated and measured.
2. The machine has primary qualities that are essential to its function and are measurable. Any aspects of the machine not quantifiable are viewed as incidental to its function.
3. The machine is composed of independent components. By taking the machine apart and studying its components in isolation, the essence of its function can be determined. Analysis does not change machine function,

since components in isolation are assumed to operate the same as components in unison.

Some researchers see this as an insufficient way of describing human experience; hence, the development of existential phenomenology. Existential phenomenology is a result of the blending of two interrelated philosophical perspectives, existentialism and phenomenology (Valle et al., 1989). This combination is concerned with a certain perspective on human existence and with a certain mode of investigating that existence. Both philosophies are a result of a common interest in human experience in the world of everyday human life, and both seek to arrive at a rigorous description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in its first-person concreteness (Pollio et al., 1983). Phenomenology provides existentialism with a method that is meant to allow it to describe experience effectively.

Valle et al. (1989, pp. 7-16) provide an excellent description of the foundations of existential phenomenology. According to them, it is widely accepted that existential philosophy was founded by the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German philosopher is generally considered to be the primary proponent of phenomenology. Another philosopher, Martin Heidegger, is essentially responsible for combining the two philosophies to describe experience in everyday human life. The major difference between existential phenomenology and

the traditional scientific philosophy is that human existence is not considered as a separate object in nature; instead the human is seen as indissolubly linked to his or her world. The two (human and world) do not exist apart from each other and each individual and his or her world are said to co-constitute one another, which is another way of saying you cannot really talk about a person without talking of her/his world (p.6). That is why "being" in existential phenomenology is invariably referred to as "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1962). This interdependency is based on a dialogue that existential phenomenologists feel takes place on a continual basis, between the person and the world. Either the person is acting upon the world or the world is acting upon the person.

Existential phenomenology discards the notion of the person as having complete free will as well as the person being completely objectified and having no free will at all. Instead the person has "situated freedom" where she/he has the opportunity and obligation to make choices within the framework of the given situation that the world has presented (p.8). Athletes must make these choices every time they train and compete. They must continually make them based on the particular setting they find themselves in, their ability, the weather conditions, the ability of the opponent and countless other possibilities.

Thompson et al. (1989, p. 137) summarize the differences between Cartesian and existential phenomenological approaches to the study of humans. As a start, note that the world view of existential phenomenology is a contextualist one in which human experience is seen as a pattern that emerges from a context. The nature of being is viewed as always and already being-in-the world and co-constituted with experience. The research focus is on experience as described by individuals from a first-person perspective. The research logic is descriptive which means the researcher tries to describe essential patterns as they develop (Husserl, 1960); the research strategy is holistic and seeks to relate descriptions of certain experiences to the overall context of the life-world; and the research goal is to arrive at a thematic description of experience.

Their summary of the Cartesian approach begins with a mechanistic view of the world, much like machines driven by forces and constraints. The nature of being human is dualistic in that humans exist separate from the physical world that surrounds them. The research focus depends upon a third-person view in which an attempt is made to determine underlying theoretical structures that operate largely on the basis of unusual laws or principles. The research logic is predictive, and hypotheses are given about future manifestations based on certain theoretical laws. The research strategy is also componential, and is used in an

attempt to understand phenomena by studying it in parts. The research goal is to have a set of determining laws and principles that reduce phenomena to a summary of their independent properties of operation. An overview of this comparison is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Comparison between Existential Phenomenology and Cartesian paradigms

<u>Tenents of paradigm</u>	<u>Existential-phenomenology</u>	<u>Cartesianism</u>
World view	Contextual	Mechanistic
Nature of being	In-the-life-world	Dualistic
Research focus	Experience	Theoretical structure
Research perspective	First-person	Third-person
Research logic	Descriptive	Predictive
Research strategy	Holistic	Componential
Research goal	Thematic description	Causal reductionism

Note From "Putting consumer experience back into consumer research: The philosophy and method of existential-phenomenology." by C. J. Thompson, W. B. Locander, & H. R. Pollio, (1989). Journal of Consumer Research, 16(2), 133-146.

As a result of these differences; it appears that existential phenomenology presents a more appropriate paradigm for describing human experience. This distinction between the two views is illustrated further in the following section, in which an overview of the two views of the human body is discussed.

Cartesian and Phenomenological Views of the Human Body

The human body has been studied and written about for centuries. One of the predominant views of the body, that has influenced many philosophers, is the idea that the body is separate from the mind. This dualistic philosophy was forwarded by Plato in his writings and later expanded upon by Descartes and other philosophers. A philosophy that seeks to contradict a dualist separation of the mind and the body is that of phenomenology.

Morgan and Meier (1988) give a brief excerpt from Plato's *Phaedo* in which he clearly views the mind as radically separate from the body. To him, the mind is the enduring quality of the human being and the body is characterized in a negative way. The body is seen as constantly struggling with desires and needs that are detrimental to the mind of a human.

Descartes' echoing Plato, drew a radical distinction between the thinking mind and the extended body, so that the ego became the true self, distinct from the body and able to

exist without it (Gerber, 1964, p. 443). According to Descartes, the body is at the beckoning of the mind and is completely controlled by it. Meier (1975) addresses this point further in his summary of Descartes' view of the body:

The body is viewed as an unthinking, extended, material substance; the mind is a thinking, unextended, immaterial substance. The body is an unconscious machine, conforming to the unwavering and rigid laws of nature; the mind (the true "essence" of man) is a conscious and free substance not susceptible to or dominated by the mechanical laws of nature. The two substances are thus viewed to be totally distinct and independent (p. 54).

In clarifying the explanation of the dualist view of the body, Thompson et al. (1989, p. 134) provide a second metaphor, the container. For the Cartesian view, the body is viewed as a container for the mind whereas the mind is viewed as a container for symbolic representations and conceptual structures (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Certain implications for studying human cognitive activity arise from this view.

1. External events, those occurring outside the body container, are objective, while internal events, those occurring inside the body container, are subjective. Experience is private, internal and, therefore, subjective (Churchland, 1985).
2. Cognitive processes can be isolated and studied in a decontextualized manner.

3. There is one true brute reality independent of human experience and one true description of the world waiting to be discovered (Johnson, 1987).

Cartesian dualism suggests an alienated relationship between mind and body. In reference to the study of the body, contemporary existential phenomenologists have attempted to break down dualistic thinking and have attempted to work from the point of view that the "body" is no less primary than the "mind"; in fact, they cannot be separated in experience. As such, the body is no longer an instrument of the mind, connected to the mind, a vehicle driven by the mind, or a devilish antagonist to the spirit. The body is you, you are your body. Your body is your mode of being-in-the-world (Gerber, 1964, p. 128).

There have been numerous philosophers since Husserl and Heidegger who have attempted to tackle the problem of the body from an existential phenomenological perspective. In this review I provide a general overview of the phenomenological view of the body as provided by Calvin O. Shrag (1962) This is followed by the specific perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). I feel these two perspectives provide a clear analysis of the phenomenological view of the body because they provide positive insight into an alternative way researchers in the field of sport psychology might view the body.

Calvin O. Schrag

Calvin O. Schrag (1962) provides a clear phenomenological analysis of the lived body in an essay entitled "The Lived Body as a Phenomenological Datum" as it is reprinted in Morgan and Meier (1988, pp. 109-117). In this work, Schrag attempts to analyze and describe the lived body in three areas that relate to the athlete involved in sport. These areas are: 1) the lived body as self-referential, 2) the lived body in reference to another person's perspective of your body, and 3) the lived body and human space.

In regard to the body as self-referential, each person's body is her/his own and is experienced uniquely. The body objectively known and referred to as a set of organs and brain waves by other people, is not the body that we know as our own and that we experience as unique to each of us. The self-referential quality of the lived body is most directly disclosed in our experience of our body as that which individualizes us. The body confers upon us our existential identity. The body is not a possession which we have and use. The body itself is not an instrument, but makes use of instruments and tools at its disposal.

Schrag indicates that even though the body is unique to each of us, it is also apprehended by an objective other. The lived body is not an isolated phenomenon, but is essentially related to a world that emerges in one's pre-

objective experience as a phenomenon in which various regions of concern are manifested. In this communal context there are two separable moments of awareness. These are the body of the other as known by each of us and the re-apprehension of our own body as known by the other. Even though one may never know the body of the other as that person lives it, there is a "reality element" that is disclosed in an encounter with the lived body of the other. The body of the other constitutes her/his project of being-in-the-world and no one else can penetrate this project as lived by the other.

As a result of this being-with-the-other, two possible existential qualifications occur: alienation and communion. Alienation occurs when a person objectifies another's body so that it can be used and manipulated for one's own ends. This constitutes somewhat of an elimination of the other's freedom. This can never completely occur, as we do not constitute the other, we only encounter her/him. Communion is possible only when the other is acknowledged as a person that can experience a co-presence in such a manner that individual freedoms are mutually acknowledged. Communication is a key element in the success of communion.

Shrag continues with a discussion of the lived body and human space. He indicates that the spatiality which qualifies the lived body is not an objective space. It is human space, and the space in which we live and in which we

apprehend our lived bodies is articulated in and through our practical and personal projects.

Having laid down a general description of the existential phenomenological view of the body, I shall now summarize the more in-depth philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He is widely respected as one of the most knowledgeable proponents of this view of the body.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

The two most noted works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty are *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) and *The Structure of Behavior* (1963). The majority of this review is based on these works as well as on interpretations of these works by others. According to Silverman (1980, pp. 706-709) and Moss (1989), Merleau-Ponty was skeptical of the Cartesian dualism and of the transcendental perspective proposed by Husserl that would create a distance from human experience rather than an orientation toward it from within it. He was concerned with our being-in-the-world as the experience of an existing self, which he characterized as embodiment. Gesture, spatiality, motility are all aspects of bodily expression, and these constitute the phenomenal field in which the meanings of experience appear. Human beings are free in that they are corporeally of the world or in the world. On this basis, phenomenology becomes an interrogation

of the languages of experience; including pictorial, psychological, political, and verbal languages.

Merleau-Ponty's works are based on the tenet that the most decisive trait of human consciousness, coloring all of its manifestations, is that it is an embodied consciousness (Meier, 1975, pp. 51-73). Human beings are incarnate beings, a unity of physical, biological, and psychological events all participating in mutual and dialectical relationships. Each of us is a body•subject or incarnate consciousness, a being-in-the-world concerned with unfoldings in the world. Meier claims that any notion that a man or woman is strictly an intellectual interiority (the mind) or the simple seat of sensations (the extended body), or even a union of these is false according to Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty did not like to use statements such as, "I have a body" or "I use my body" as some sort of instrument I could do without. Instead, he indicated that "my body is myself, the person who I am." The manner in which we live our body from our personal perspective presents a sharply different perception than that of the objective body which is externally observed through the delimited scope of anatomical and physiological science. The lived body is not an object which we possess; rather it is us and we are our bodies. A person's mode of insertion into the world is the body; as such, it is the foundation of personal existence.

We do use our bodies as an instrument in a sense. The body is our means of perception of and action upon others in the world. The body is also our mode of communication in the world. Merleau-Ponty rejected the traditional argument that the body is a passive receiving station for data emanating from subjects. The body is form-giving, and only through the function of perception can there be "sense-data". Perception is defined as the process of rendering oneself present to something through the body. The theory of the body is a theory of perception and conversely a theory of perception is a theory of the body.

Generally speaking, we are aware of some aspect of the world that is relevant to us at a particular time rather than being aware of our bodies per se. Pollio et al. (1993) describe this class of personal experience in terms of the philosophical concept of intentionality. Husserl first introduced the concept of intentionality to philosophy in an attempt to capture the descriptive insight that "every experience has its reference or direction toward what is experienced, and every experienced phenomenon reflects a mode of expression to which it is present (Ihde, 1986, p. 42-44)." Within the psychological realm it is important to note that intentionality is not an intellectual process that connects a thinking subject with something in some outside world, but rather describes a relationship between that subject and a world that it never has full grasp but always is in relation

to. Fundamentally we are related to the contexts in which we live.

Another aspect of the body that Merleau-Ponty discussed in detail was the lived experience of the body. Merleau-Ponty (1962) called the individual's body, as it is lived and experienced, a *lived body* (or "own body," *corps propre*) (Moss, 1989). The "lived-body" is at the center of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy (Pollio et al., 1993), and he felt it was not something dualist philosophers could understand since their view of the body could only consider it as an object. The subjective consciousness and the lived experience of the lived body are not amenable to behavioristic experimental psychology, which attempts to reduce the dialectic between human beings and the world to a stimulus-response relationship. Merleau-Ponty had a difficult time overcoming the long-standing tradition of viewing the body as simply an object although he did try to demonstrate that stimuli do not explain the perceptual field and that the human body arranges its perceptual fields. This was taken to mean that the "subject we experience" is not alien to the "order of things" and the order of things is not alien to the realm of the subject.

A final aspect of the body that I will discuss is Merleau-Ponty's notion of habit. This is treated by Merleau-Ponty as an automatic motor ability. He explains this concept with the example of a typist who has learned where

the keys are located on the typewriter and does not have to think about where each key is located in order to type well.

It is possible to know how to type without being able to say where the letters which make the words are to be found on the banks of keys. To know how to type is not, then, to know the place of each letter among the keys, nor even to have acquired a conditional reflex for each one, which is set in motion by the letter among the keys, nor even to have acquired a conditional reflex for each one, which is set in motion by the letter as it comes before our eye. It is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort. The subject knows where the letters are on the typewriter as we know where one of our limbs is, through a knowledge bred of familiarity which does not give us a position in objective space (Van den Berg, 1962).

It is as if the typist incorporates the typewriter into her/his bodily space and it becomes an extension of the hand. A sport example might be a situation where a javelin thrower is learning how to throw the javelin. The javelin is an extremely technical event and takes a great deal of discipline and dedication to learn. The javelin may feel more clumsy in the thrower's hand on some days than others, but eventually the javelin feels comfortable and the thrower does not have to think about it, which indicates that the javelin thrower is now integrated with his or her body. The technical aspects of the throw become habit and allow the athlete to "just throw it," provided, of course, the thrower allows the javelin to become an extension of the hand.

A second example from sport might be when a person learns to play paddle ball and has difficulty learning the tasks needed to play the game effectively. The paddle might

feel awkward at times and difficult to maneuver in a way that allows the player to be fluid and make successful contact with the ball. If practiced diligently, however, the paddle some days feels more comfortable in the hands and the player is able to move around the court more freely. With much practice, the player becomes confident and is able to handle the paddle with ease. During moments like these, the person feels in control of her/his being-in-the-world around them.

Themes in the Experience of the Human Body

To determine what people are aware of when they report being aware of their bodies, MacGillivray (1986) conducted phenomenological interviews with sixteen adults. Among the participants were several people who possessed certain high level bodily skills including professional dancers, amateur athletes, and actors. The opening question was, "Could you please tell me some times when you are aware of your body?" A second question was: "Could you please tell me what you were aware of in that situation?" Three major themes emerged from the data in this study. Each theme included sub themes, and MacGillivray provides examples of each theme from the context of a runner's possible experiences of running.

The first theme was the "Experience of Engagement". This theme indicates the person is completely absorbed in an

activity and his or her primary focus is on the immediate surroundings or the project at hand. At times there is a "curious absence" of awareness or experience of the body in these situations. The first sub-theme of the Experience of Engagement is Body as Vitality. In this case the person feels engaged with little or no experience of the body. Instead she/he feels an absorption in the world and "caught up" in the world. This can be experienced as either pleasant or frightening depending on how comfortable the person is with self/world boundaries. The second sub-theme is Body as Activity. Within this sub-theme the main focus is on the body-as-physical where emphasis is on the concrete movements in which the person is engaged. A person may experience running in several different ways. He or she might experience Vitality when feeling in control and full of energy. This might occur if the runner becomes totally involved in the run and loses concept of time and awareness of her/his body. Activity might be noted if the runner is aware of her/his feet hitting the pavement or of the feeling of moving arms and legs after being sedentary all day.

A second theme that emerged from the interviews was that of the Experiences of Corporeality. Here the body as physical becomes figural and may be experienced as an object in the world or as an instrument of gaining an end. As such,

the person experiences it as acting upon things as well as being acted upon. The first sub-theme is Body as Instrument, and this occurs when the body is viewed as a tool which can be experienced both as accomplishing certain ends and as it has been trained to perform in a skillful manner. In this way the body requires maintenance and can be "broken down" and "built up". The second sub-theme was Body as Object, where the person experiences the body as having limitations similar to other objects. It can become impaired through illness or injury. While pain and illness are experiences in which a person is aware of the body as an object, there are other more pleasurable experiences such as in the initial stages of sex. Utilizing the specific example of the runner again, MacGillivray indicates the instrumental quality of the body becomes figural when the runner is aware of pacing, breath, and speed to accomplish the run skillfully. An example of experiencing the body as an object is when the runner experiences pain or when attempts to limit or avoid the pain are made.

The third theme to emerge from the interviews was the Experiences of Interpersonal Meaning; that is, the body can be experienced in terms of its social and symbolic meaning. In these situations the body may be involved in the private aspects of the self as well as in the shared meanings of the

social world. The first sub-theme under the experience of Interpersonal Meaning is the Body as an Expression of Self. This theme applies whenever a person is aware of how the situation expresses a meaning or purpose for the self or others. A person's lifestyle and character are described as bodily expressions of the self. The second sub-theme is the Body as Appearance and this applies whenever the body is experienced as being on display for others to observe, or as it appears to the self in the role of the other. The theme of expression of self is realized when a runner feels a sense of accomplishment and purpose through running. The theme of the body as appearance occurs when the runner is aware of the gazes and admiring looks of others while running.

Figure 1 provides the themes of the human experience of the human body MacGillivray found in his phenomenological interview study. This study was included in the review of literature because several aspects of the experience of the body that his participants described were also discussed in the experience of the participants in this study.

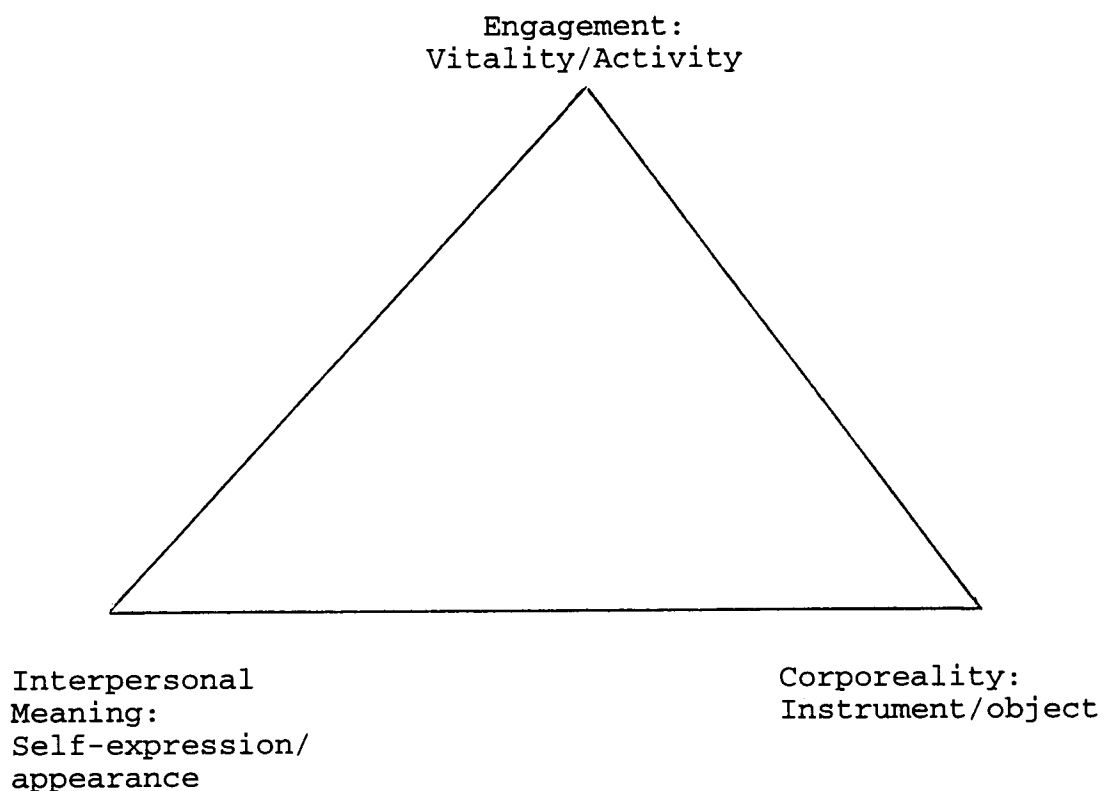


Figure 1 Themes of the Experience of the Body

Note From "Ambiguity and embodiment: A phenomenological analysis of the lived body." by W. MacGillivray, (1986). Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

In this section I have attempted to describe some of the ways in which the phenomenological view of the body differs from the traditional dualist conception of the body. The following quote effectively summarizes the differences.

When science speaks of bodies, it is referring to objects which can be measured, quantified, and described in accordance with mechanical laws. The human body obviously exhibits some of the same characteristics as do other natural bodies. Its weight, size, and motion in relation to other objects can be measured, and its activity can be partially accounted for in terms of physical laws. Phenomenology does not reject such explanations but shows their limitations as complete accounts of human behavior. Phenomenology argues that the human body cannot merely be understood as another thing in nature or an object among physical objects such as trees, stones, and stars, for the reason that the body of a person is that from which and by means of which all such natural objects are experienced (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p.96).

In the struggle to bring to the forefront the athlete's experience while participating in sport, it is imperative that researchers in sport psychology begin utilizing methods based on the phenomenological view and others like it. One such methodology is the qualitative interview. In the following section I provide an overview of several types of qualitative interviews as well as a rationale for choosing the interview methodology for this study.

Types of Interviews

Simple or complex, face-to-face exchanges between human beings have served for eons to convey messages, express sympathy, declare war, make truces, and preserve history

(Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The interview is an extension of conversation and is a vital tool for researchers to use. As Shubert (1971) notes, the word "interview" evokes a picture of at least two people talking together with some purpose in mind. According to Brenner, Brown, and Canter (1985), interviews depend on face-to-face questioning of participants as well as on eliciting information from them. Briggs (1986) says in order for a conversation to be considered an interview, data must be collected in this face-to-face situation. Lofland (1971) identifies the term "interview":

as being constructed out of two words, "inter" and "view." To "view" means to look at, to have a perception of. "Inter" means between two objects or points, as in inter-city transit. Therefore the term interview refers to the act of perceiving as conducted between two separate points; in the present case, between two separate people.

In ordinary conversations people ask questions and provide answers all of the time. In the typical conversation, however, there is usually a great deal of miscommunication because either the person asking the questions is not very clear or the person supposedly listening is not doing so. There are frequent interruptions by both parties because each may be trying to dominate the conversation. People develop habits in conversation that are detrimental to the process of gaining information and, in order to be "successful qualitative interviewers," there must be substantial changes in the approach taken to conversation.

Indeed, one of the greatest obstacles to overcome in learning to be a skilled qualitative interviewer is unlearning the bad habits learned and reinforced in ordinary conversations (Patton, 1987). If conducted correctly, interviewing allows one person to learn a great deal about information that is not on the surface; namely about another person's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. It is difficult to discern a person's subjective experience without actually asking them. The question that qualitative researchers continually struggle with is, "What is the most effective way to gain insight into a person's views and what she/he is now experiencing, or has experienced in the past?"

Qualitative interviewing is open-ended in nature and, although qualitative interviews are referred to in many different ways, they are most commonly categorized on the basis of (1) the type of person being questioned (or the roles they occupy), and (2) the structure and administration of the interview (LeCompte & Preissle, 1992). LeCompte & Preissle point out that there a variety of names given for the different types of interviews.

For the purpose of this review two categories of interviews will be discussed, along with various sub-categories of each. I chose these particular categories because I felt they offered a nice contrast. I provide strengths and weaknesses of each category as well as a rationale for using the interview method for this study. The

first interview category is the standardized open-ended format (Patton, 1980). Within this category the oral questionnaire and the interview guide approach will be discussed. The second category is the non-standardized format. Within this category I will discuss the naturalistic and phenomenological interviews

Standardized Open-ended

The standardized open-ended interview is also known as a scheduled standardized interview (Denzin, 1978). The most widely used type of interview in this category is a questionnaire that is administered orally and in which all respondents are asked the same questions in the same order. Answers are written down by the interviewer verbatim or in specially coded spaces. Richardson, Dohrenwend, and Klein (1965) indicate that most investigators who use the scheduled standardized interview believe standardization is most effectively achieved this way. According to Sjoberg and Nett (1968) standardization greatly enhances reliability. The assumption that underlies the use of this type of interview is that in order to produce a response that validly differentiates one respondent from another, the stimulus must be identical (Richardson et al., 1965). According to this assumption, if the question is to function as an identical stimulus to every respondent, it must be worded identically each time it is presented.

Gorden (1980) stresses that in this type of controlled interview, the researcher also controls the topic of discussion and does not allow the interviewee or respondent to vary much from the set protocol of questions. The researcher who employs this method is attempting to verify existing theories or hypotheses instead of basing their theoretical approach on grounded theory (for a more detailed discussion see Glaser and Strauss (1967)). In their book entitled "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" Glaser and Strauss talk about generating theory from data, with most hypotheses and concepts not only coming from the data but being systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of research.

The second sub-category of a scheduled open-ended interview is the general interview guide approach (Patton, 1987) or the structured in-depth interview (Bauman & Adair, 1992). This type of interview is less structured than an oral questionnaire and allows the interviewer to be more flexible during the interview process. It is however, not free-flowing or determined by the respondent's interest; rather it is focused on a specific issue or set of issues and a guide helps specify what should be covered in the interview. The interviewer begins the interview with an idea of what she/he wants to accomplish and utilizes the guide to achieve this. Once the initial question is asked, the researcher is not necessarily required to ask questions from

the guide in a particular order. By using an interview guide, the researcher can rely on a checklist of sorts, a kind of inventory of things to talk about during the interview. One can check them off as they are accomplished (Lofland, 1971).

The strength of the standardized approach to interviewing is that it reduces the bias that can occur from having different interviews for different people, including the problem of obtaining a great deal of data from certain persons while getting less systematic information from others (Patton, 1987). It increases reliability of the study when several different people are involved in conducting interviews since all questions are carefully prepared beforehand and are asked in the same manner. The standardized interview is quite efficient because it saves time and money when interviewing takes place on a large scale.

There are many qualitative researchers, however, that oppose this type of interview and there is ample literature to highlight the negative aspects. Elliot Mishler wrote an entire book "Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative" to voice his displeasure with the standardized approach to interviewing. He says that this approach is too "sterile" (Mishler, 1986, pp. 10,11,13) and argues that it contains two detrimental assumptions of the interview process. The first is the assumption that an interview is a behavioral rather

than a linguistic event. The standardized approach is referred to not as speech or conversation between people but as "verbal exchange." A second assumption is that the standardized approach relies on a stimulus-response paradigm, where the researcher is only interested in obtaining a verbal response to a question that is asked of the person being interviewed. An added weakness of this method of interviewing is its restricting of the pursuit of topics or issues that were not anticipated when the questions were written (Patton, 1987). During the course of an interview a question might trigger other thoughts that the respondent wants to pursue, but the researcher must keep the interview on track. Richardson, Dohrenwend, and Klein (1965) state that in order for a standardized interview to be effective, the group being interviewed must be relatively homogeneous. If this is not the case, individuals in the group are likely to respond differently because they do not interpret the question the same way.

A majority of the interview studies in the field of sport psychology utilize either an oral questionnaire or interview guide approach. Often both are used to make a study "more valid" for quantitative-minded reviewers. While there are instances when this type of interview format might be used, it seems too restrictive when some aspect(s) of human experience is the phenomenon to be studied.

Non-standardized

A second major interview category may be termed the non-standardized interview. It is not completely clear where on the spectrum the non-standardized interview falls except that it basically has no preconceived structure other than an initial question and a few probes based on the dialogue of the interview. It is also referred to as a non-directive approach by (Sjoberg & Nett, 1968; Whyte, 1984).

Dexter (1970) states that as interviewers we should look upon our interviews with people as "elite interviews." An elite interview is an interview with any interviewee who in terms of the current purposes of the interview is given special treatment. The interviewee's definition of the situation is stressed, the interviewee is encouraged to structure the account of the situation, and the interviewee is allowed to introduce her/his regards as relevant, instead of relying on what the interviewer deems relevant. Along these lines, Mishler (1986) also seeks to shift attention away from the investigator's "problems" such as technical issues of reliability and validity, to the respondent's problems, specifically to her/his efforts to construct coherent and reasonable worlds of meaning and to make sense of her/his experiences.

There are a few non-standardized interview types that provide researchers with a more appropriate method of investigating human experience than a standardized approach.

Hanson and Newburg (1992) proposed one such method in the initial edition of a new qualitative journal in sport psychology entitled *Contemporary Thought in Performance Enhancement*. They indicated that sport psychology research should begin to place more emphasis on subjective experiences by utilizing a more naturalistic methodology. This qualitative method has its roots in anthropology and is a discovery oriented approach. As Patton (1980, p. 41) has stated, the goal of naturalistic research is to "understand naturally occurring phenomena in their naturally occurring states." Naturalistic research is a process that allows the researcher to learn more about a particular person's experience without having a set of predetermined questions. The interview process begins with a particular question to provide guidance to the interview and follow-up questions are then asked based on the respondent's discussion. After a response to the initial question is given, a second question is asked based on the response, and this continues throughout the interview. This method allows the person being interviewed to be the expert on the subject and to be in control of the interview. The researcher's expertise and responsibility are focused on the process of asking relevant and effective questions.

In a similar manner, the theory behind phenomenological interviewing also differs from that of survey-questionnaire interviewing. It is conceived as a discourse or conversation

(Mishler, 1986). Unlike questionnaires that require the researcher to systematize and present "canned" questions to all participants in order to evoke stimulus-response interactions, phenomenological interviews tend to be more open-ended. The goal of a phenomenological interview is to obtain a first-person description of some specified domain of experience (Thompson et al., 1989). The phenomenological interview also differs from other descriptive and qualitative approaches because it focuses on the participant's experienced meaning rather than on descriptions of his or her overt actions or behavior. Phenomenology maintains the critical distinction between what presents itself as part of a person's awareness and what might exist as a reality "outside" of that experience. The task of the researcher in a phenomenological interview is to encourage the participant to reflect on her/his experience and to convey it in as much detail as possible. In this type of interview it is important for the researcher to take a respectful position to the expert on the phenomenon - - the person describing her/his experience. In actuality the person being interviewed is not referred to as a subject; rather, she/he is referred to as a participant and is co-researcher in the study (Giorgi, 1970).

Thompson et al. (1989) indicate that a phenomenological interview format is circular instead of linear and dialogue is largely set by the participant. All questions are meant

to follow the dialogue, and are aimed at learning about the respondent's experience instead of confirming the interviewer's previously held hypotheses. In the phenomenological interview, asking the question "Why?" is discouraged. "Why" questions can be perceived as requests for rationalizations and can render feelings of pre-judgment and defensive responses (Argyris, 1982).

As Markson and Gognalons-Caillard (1971) point out, the great advantage to a non standardized open-ended interview such as the phenomenological interview is its flexibility, which allows the researcher to grasp more fully the participant's experience than would be possible in a more rigidly methodological technique such as oral questionnaire or the interview guide approach. Pollio et al. (1993) provide further discussion of the distinctions between phenomenological and traditional modes of asking questions:

The phenomenological interview cannot (and should not) be conceived as a rule-driven, mechanical activity. There is no methodological guarantee that any rule applied in a specific encounter will have the same meaning or effect for the interviewer and the person being interviewed. For the interview to be a path or way of understanding the life world of a co-participant, it must be allowed to emerge freely rather than to be constrained by predetermined injunctions. (p. 48)

Polkinghorne (1986, p. 49) provides an outline of the aspects of the phenomenological interview as described by Kvale (1983). As he notes the focus of the interview is on the life-world of the participant and is theme oriented and not person oriented. The interview seeks to describe and

understand the meaning of the central themes of the experience, to obtain nuanced descriptions that are stringent in meaning and interpretations, to obtain a description of the experience without the participant's theoretical explanations, and to obtain descriptions of specific situations and action sequences that are instances of the theme being investigated instead of general opinions.

There are weaknesses of the of the phenomenological interview. First, it is extremely time consuming and may limit the researcher in the number of individuals she/he may interview. Another weakness of this format might be that an informant will talk endlessly about a particular subject and not allow enough time to address other areas of the experience. Some proponents of the standardized format would argue that reliability is affected when informants are not asked the same questions in the same manner. Another potential drawback might be that different researchers interviewing the same person may collect conflicting data.

Even with these limitations, there are several reasons why the interview format is more desirable than a standardized format. One advantage is that the respondent controls the interview and an investigator will get what is on the respondent's mind at the time. For respondents who do not feel at ease speaking about themselves in a more "structured" interview type format, the phenomenological approach will be effective in making them feel more

comfortable. Other strengths include an interpersonal parity between the researcher and informant and flexibility of interview format. The researcher is cast more as a student willing to learn from the informant. The interviewer is free to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style with the focus of the interview always on the interviewee's experience. All of these features contribute to the flexibility of the non-standardized interview.

In summary, the major methodological issue with interview dialogue is the opportunity for bias to enter into the dialogue itself. Much of this concern is based on the type of question being asked. There are open-ended questions and restrictive or closed questions that create different contexts for the dialogue between researcher and participant. In restrictive dialogue, the researcher is viewed as the person with the privileged perspective since the participant is seen in the more traditional role of the subject and responds in a reactive manner to questions being asked. The restrictive dialogue is like a stimulus-response scenario where the question is the stimulus and the response is the answer to that specific question.

It is a mistake to assume that all questions function in the same manner in all dialogic situations. In a phenomenological interview, questions function differently than those in a questionnaire or other more standardized

formats. For example, there is much more latitude in the phenomenological interview for the participant to ascertain the researcher's point of reference and to state his or her own point of reference. The dialogue is grounded in the participant's experience of both the interview and the phenomenon. In the survey or structured interview the dialogue is not always anchored in the participant's experience.

Within the context of a phenomenological interview, the questioning has a descriptive and facilitative purpose rather than one that seeks to assess pre-existing opinions or knowledge. No one question is completely critical for understanding the overall interview because the interview is more like a conversation than a question and answer session. Since the participant in the dialogue is the one who has the privileged perspective on his or her experience, leading questions by the researcher that do not follow the dialogue may be quickly corrected by the participant. If the researcher is persistent in asking questions or making inferences that do not follow the dialogue, there is a possibility of losing valuable information pertaining to the participant's experience. In conclusion, the phenomenological interview can be a very effective tool for researchers in sport psychology who are attempting to describe the experience of athletes. Specific examples of

studies based on the phenomenological perspective are addressed in the following section.

Peak Performance in Sport

There are a few examples of qualitative research in sport that pertain to peak or top performances. In most of these studies an interview guide was utilized to structure the questions asked of all respondents. All follow-up questions also were pre-determined and reflected the researcher's assumptions going into the study. Polkinghorne (1989) refers to these methods as "quasi-phenomenological" methods. Although the methodology used in these studies is somewhat different than that used in the present study, both are used in an attempt to ascertain the experience of elite athletes when they were performing well.

Privette (1981) defines a peak performance as a behavior that exceeds one's average performance. Williams and Krane (1993, p. 123) describe peak performances as magical moments when an athlete puts it all together both physically and mentally. The performance is exceptional and seems to transcend ordinary levels of play.

Loehr (1982) interviewed hundreds of athletes to determine what they were feeling when they were playing at their best. The athletes gave surprisingly similar accounts.

They described this time as a time of being physically relaxed, calm minded, self-confident, optimistic in outlook, of high energy, and effortless and automatic in performance. The athletes said it was like they were playing possessed, yet in complete control. Time seemed to slow down and they played with profound intensity, total concentration and enthusiasm. In one study by Garfield and Bennett (1984), hundreds of elite athletes were interviewed and asked to identify feelings they had during moments when they performed extremely well. Several mental and physical characteristics were identified that included being mentally and physically relaxed, focused on the present, confident/optimistic, in control of their mind and body, highly energized, extraordinarily aware, and "in the cocoon" or detached from the external environment.

George (1988) interviewed ten collegiate baseball players as to the mental preparation strategies they utilized and the effects these strategies had on peak performance. These athletes indicated a feeling of confidence and a sense of control. Attention was narrowly focused on the task and there was a time/space disorientation (in most cases this meant that time seemed to slow down and they were able to see the baseball better).

Cohn (1991) investigated the psychological characteristics of peak performance in golf. He interviewed

nineteen professional and collegiate golfers and his findings further substantiated those of previous studies. During peak performance, the athletes were immersed in the task and highly focused, performed effortlessly and automatically, felt physically and mentally relaxed, felt in control of themselves and their performances, and had no fear of failing.

Ecklund (1991) interviewed collegiate wrestlers about their all-time best performance as well as about their worst performance. He found themes similar to those of earlier studies conducted with athletes who were asked to recall their top performance. The wrestlers reported having total concentration, a task- relevant focus, heightened arousal and intensity, positive expectancies and high confidence levels. In contrast, during their worst performance they indicated feeling listless, over or under aroused, worried about losing, and had irrelevant or negative thoughts as well as a general lack of concentration.

These interviews with elite athletes demonstrate several characteristics of top performances that are consistent across athletes in various situations. Table 2 provides an overview of these characteristics.

Table 2 Characteristics of Peak Performance

Expectations

self-confident
 optimistic outlook
 enthusiastic
 no fear of failing

Arousal Level

mentally relaxed
 physically relaxed
 calm minded
 high energy
 highly energized

Focus

focused on the present
 narrow focus of attention
 task relevant focus

Awareness

time disorientation
 extraordinary awareness
 in cocoon/detached from
 environment

Locus of Control

in control of mind and body
 playing possessed yet in complete control
 effortless/automatic performance

The characteristics of peak performance provided in Table 2 represent qualities of performance that athletes are continually striving to accomplish. The first category of characteristics involves the expectations these athletes had about their ability to perform at an optimal level. They were very self-confident; meaning they had little doubt that they would do well. Their outlook was positive and they were enthusiastic (i.e., they enjoyed participating and looked forward to the competition). Also, they were not afraid of failing. One of the toughest things for an athlete to do in sport is to attempt to play near her/his potential while being afraid to fail. The athletes in this study were willing to take chances or "go for it" when it was time; which allowed them to be more of an "athlete" rather than cautious person afraid of not performing well.

Once the competition began the arousal level of the athletes in these studies were at an optimum level. Athletes have varying levels of arousal at which they perform well, and the athletes in these studies felt their arousal level was where it needed to be for them in that particular situation. Some of them were relaxed and calm, while others had a high energy level. Whatever level it was it was at the level that allowed them to be effective.

These athletes had a narrow focus of attention. They were focused on the present; meaning they did not think about things in the past (such as previous competitions or previous

aspects of the current competition) nor were they focusing on things that would happen in the future. As well as being focused on the present moment, they were narrowly focused on the specific task that was most relevant for them at that time. Some of these athletes discussed being in "a cocoon or detached from their environment" as their world consisted of only themselves and their task. Time seemed to slow down for them at different times during their performance as well.

All of these characteristics allowed these athletes to be in control of themselves as these components worked together. The performance seemed to be effortless or automatic. They did not have to put forth a great amount of effort to perform well, and they were playing like they were "possessed" yet in complete control.

In this review of literature section I have attempted to provide a history of existential phenomenology and demonstrate why it is a more appropriate philosophical paradigm to use when studying human experience.

A general existential phenomenological view of the body was described from the viewpoint of Calvin O. Shrag and then a more in-depth description of the existential phenomenological view of the body from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty was introduced. This view was then contrasted with the traditional dualist view of the body. Findings from MacGillivray's (1986) phenomenological interviews about the experience of the body were given as well.

In subsequent sections I briefly identified the various interview types that are used in research involving humans and their experiences. Differences in these interview formats were highlighted and strengths and weaknesses of each were provided. I attempted to provide sufficient support for the use of the phenomenological method in this study. In addition, a few examples of studies investigating peak performance using qualitative measures were overviewed.

The main intent of the present study was to utilize a methodology that would allow me to effectively ascertain and describe the experience of elite athletes without placing a-priori limitations on the possible dialogue of the interviews. This methodology is addressed in further detail in the following chapter.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned earlier, the methodology we choose to investigate a topic should not dictate the questions we attempt to ask. In keeping with this view, I will now identify what I consider to be the most sufficient steps in a research process that attempts to describe the "most memorable or meaningful" performance of a group of elite decathletes. These steps include: a) a description of the pilot testing that I conducted, b) a description of the bracketing techniques I underwent in order to identify my own biases, c) a description of the participants who were the co-researchers in this study, d) a description of the methodology utilized to conduct the study, and e) a description of the analysis of the data.

Pilot Testing

I conducted two pilot studies during the time I was in graduate school (e.g., Dale, 1993; 1994) in order to learn the proper techniques of conducting interviews with elite athletes. In the first of these pilot studies, I interviewed two NCAA champion decathletes on the subject of their experience during a "peak or best ever" performance in a decathlon competition. In the second study I interviewed

elite runners on the subject of their top performance in a competition.

These pilot studies were particularly useful in helping me learn how to ask questions that followed the dialogue and invite conversation rather than hinder it and to put participants at ease (Parker, 1993). These interviews also assisted me in developing the major question of the current study.

Bias Exploration and Bracketing

Bracketing of one's apriori assumptions to the best of her/his ability is a vital aspect of conducting reliable qualitative research. To accomplish this, the researcher must first engage in self-reflection on the topic that she/he intends to investigate. This is done to better understand the meaning of the phenomenon from the point of view of the participant (Valle et al., 1989). Bracketing in its original use was seen as negative by Husserl because he felt that one should bracket the "natural attitude," or assumptions about what is real or is "not real." He felt this was important to do so that someone studying a particular phenomenon could remain open to the essential structure of consciousness of the phenomenon. Husserl believed that the "natural attitude" could never be completely bracketed nor reduction to consciousness ever obtained.

Existential phenomenologists view bracketing in a more positive light and they refer to it as a way of seeing things. Rather than suspending worldly knowledge, the interpreter applies a world-view such that a phenomenological understanding may occur and allow for a first-person description of the experience (Pollio et al., 1993). One way this may be achieved is by having the researcher participate in a bracketing interview conducted by an interviewer not involved in the study. In the process of a bracketing interview, the researcher is asked questions about the topic and transcripts of the bracketing interview are analyzed to discover preconceived assumptions of the researcher. Nothing is taken for granted and all experiences described by the researcher are viewed as if they are happening for the first time. The researcher writes down her/his presuppositions and makes them visible from the very beginning, making it easier to be a good listener and to avoid misunderstanding the phenomenon as it exists for the participant. It must be noted, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) emphasizes, that it is impossible to achieve total reduction. Phenomenological reduction does not involve an absence of presuppositions, but a consciousness of one's presuppositions. This makes the research process difficult and susceptible to criticism by proponents of the more objective scientific method. It is however, useless to pretend presuppositions do not exist, and

most philosophic studies acknowledge this and attempt to take it into account.

As the researcher in this study I participated in a bracketing interview with a skilled qualitative researcher not involved in the study. The interview was transcribed and then analyzed to discern particular themes of my biases and world view. My presuppositions about what decathletes might say about their most memorable or meaningful performance were written down and referred to throughout this study to help make me more cognizant of them.

This bracketing interview confirmed my preconceived thought that these athletes would identify their "most memorable or meaningful" performance as the performance in which they scored the most points. I expected these athletes to experience a sense of camaraderie with other decathletes with whom they competed. In addition, I expected them to be very aware of the other competitors and to compare themselves to how the other competitors were doing as well as to compare themselves to their previous best performance or to the point table. Finally, it became clear that I was familiar with the language elite athletes use when discussing the decathlon.

By participating in this bracketing interview, I believe I was able to refrain from leading the participants in a particular direction that did not directly follow the dialogue and their experience. I was able to phrase questions in the participant's terminology and not to ask

"why?" since such questions may be perceived as requests for rationalizations and can engender feelings of pre-judgment and defensive responses. Such questions may also put the subject in the position of a "naive scientist" seeking to find a plausible explanation for her/his actions (Thompson et al., 1989).

Ideally, bracketing is done throughout the entire process of the study. And, even though there is no way of ascertaining all of my biases, I feel this interview allowed me to minimize the influence that my presuppositions might have had on this study. Further bracketing strategies will be discussed in the analysis section.

Participants

Participants in phenomenological research are chosen because of their experience with a particular phenomena and for their potential to provide a rich description of this experience. This is also referred to as purposeful sampling (Hanson & Newburg, 1992; Jackson, 1992), which means that the participants are chosen with a specific purpose in mind. Van Kaam (1969, p. 328) defined the following six skills that the ideal participant should possess: (a) the ability to express him or herself without difficulty, (b) the ability to sense and express their inner feelings without feelings of guilt, (c) the ability to express organic experiences that accompany these feelings, (d) to have experienced the phenomena being

described relatively recently, (e) to have a spontaneous and genuine interest in their experience, and (f) to have the ability to report what was happening with them during the experience. The researcher plays a significant role in providing an atmosphere in which the participant feels comfortable enough to demonstrate these skills.

Phenomenological researchers do not select participants at random in order to meet statistical requirements. The point of participant selection is to obtain richly varied description, not to achieve statistical generalization (Polkinghorne, 1989). Ideally the researcher should select a variety of participants who have different experiences of the same phenomenon.

The participants in the current study were 7 elite decathlon participants ranging in ages from 26-30. These athletes are considered elite because they have all scored at least 8000 points in the decathlon, which is the standard for excellence recognized throughout the world in decathlon competition. Each one of the athletes has represented the United States in international competition and several have participated in both the World Championships and the Olympic Games. These athletes are all U. S. citizens and are currently living in this country.

Person as Instrument Statement

In phenomenological interviews the researcher plays a vital role during the course of the study. Every researcher comes to a study with a history that has led her/him to study something of interest. It is important to describe the researcher as the instrument in the study. Following, is a description of my experiences that played a role in selecting the topic of the current study.

I am currently a third-year doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where I am a graduate assistant with the men's and women's athletic departments in the area of sport psychology. Under the direction of my major professor, I consult with athletes and coaches from ten different sports on an individual and team basis, assisting them in developing systematic plans for competition. I have had a passion for sports ever since I can remember and have always been involved in a variety of sports in one capacity or another. I participated in sports throughout each year from the time I played on my first little league baseball team. Prior to my doctoral program I was a teacher at all levels (kindergarten through college) and coached football, basketball, baseball, and track and field at the high school level. I developed an interest in this current study after observing several decathletes achieve a high level of performance over ten events in a competition and after

interviewing two NCAA champions in regard to their experience during their top performance.

Procedure

Each of the participants in this study was initially contacted in person in June 1993 at the USA Track and Field Championships in Eugene, Oregon. I met with each personally and discussed the topic of the study. All indicated they would be interested in participating and provided me with their home address and telephone numbers. They were informed that I would contact them in November or December to schedule a time and place that would be convenient for them to participate in the interview. All participants were then contacted by telephone to confirm a commitment to participate in the study and to determine a convenient time and location to conduct the interviews. As the researcher, I traveled to each of the participant's hometown with the exception of one who I met in a city where he was working at a convention. The interviews lasted between one and a half and two hours.

Interview Protocol

Characteristically, phenomenological interviews are open-ended and unstructured, requiring enough time to explore the topic in depth- usually from half an hour to an hour or more (Polkinghorne, 1989).

An implicit assumption of this procedure is that central or personally-relevant issues will emerge repeatedly throughout the dialogue (Polkinghorne, 1989). The questions and clarification made by the researcher or interviewer are designed to allow the participant to describe experience and not to fit any pre-determined theories or hypotheses. The most effective questions focus on specific experiences that are described in full detail. The interviewer facilitates the interview by asking questions such as: What was it like?, or "How did you feel when that happened?". It is also important to use the participant's vocabulary when clarifying statements.

The initial, and perhaps most critical stage of the phenomenological interview is the building of rapport between researcher and participant. It is of vital importance that the person being interviewed is at ease and trusts the researcher. To enhance this trust, the researcher must insure confidentiality and conduct the interview without judging the participant. Being a good listener who is empathetic and shows interest in the participant also enhances the rapport between researcher and participant.

Once rapport was established, I was able to begin to attain what Thompson et al. (1989) refer to as a first-person description of the athletes' experience. The entire interview process was audio taped and transcribed to allow for a later analysis of the topics discussed. Each

participant was notified of the protocol and signed a consent form indicating his willingness to participate.

Once the interview process was under way, it was my task as the researcher to encourage the participant to be aware of aspects of his experience that might not ordinarily be attended to, thereby enabling him to describe the experience in clear detail. This takes place if the researcher is able to formulate the right question that taps the participant's experience (Colaizzi, 1978). The dialogue between each participant and myself took more of a spiraling direction than a linear one, and I did not begin the interview feeling that I knew more about the topic than the participant. Actually, I attempted to enter each interview session with the opposite assumption.

Each interview began with an open-ended question and this initial question was asked in a way that gave direction to the interview. The question for this study was: "Would you please take a few minutes to think about your most 'memorable' or 'meaningful' decathlon competition and describe your experience during that competition?" From this point on, the direction of the interview was dictated by the participant. I made every effort to avoid leading the participant in a direction she/he might not have gone without certain probes, and each question followed the dialogue (e.g., spiraling dialogue).

In phenomenological interviewing the researcher must be open to new and different descriptions of the participant's experience during the course of the interview. Rather than seeking general opinions, the interview should focus on specific situations and action sequences that are instances of the theme under investigation so that the essence or structure of the theme will emerge and show itself. When the statements of a participant were ambiguous, I attempted to seek clarification by probing the participant for more information or a more in-depth description.

Data Analysis

Once each interview was complete, I had the task of analyzing the transcripts and of interpreting the data with fidelity to the phenomenon being studied. Colaizzi (1978) provides several steps that I utilized to enhance proper interpretation of the data. The first step was to read through the entire protocol several times for a sense of the whole. Once this was done I was able to extract significant statements that directly pertained to the experience that was studied. At this time I began to formulate meanings as they emerged from significant statements. These formulated meanings were then put into clusters of themes. During this process it was imperative to refer to the original data in order to see if anything had been deleted or added. If contradictory themes surfaced, they were considered because

they might have been important indications of something that was missed in an earlier part of the analysis. Next, I integrated the results of the data into a detailed description of the topic and then formulated a statement of identification of its fundamental structure. The last step, and a very important one, was to return to each participant and get his feedback as to whether the description provided an accurate account of the experience. According to Polkinghorne (1989) the researcher should ask each participant, "How do my descriptive results compare with your experience?" This was done for each athlete and if anything was added or deleted, it was incorporated into the final draft of the project.

To interpret qualitative data the researcher must apply some interpretive frameworks. The framework that is chosen determines the methods, interpretive goals, and evaluative criteria for the study (Pollio et al., 1993, p. 52). From the perspective of existential phenomenology, interview transcripts are interpreted to provide descriptions of lived experiences. Pollio et al. (1993) indicate that there are two primary interpretive procedures that should be used to interpret lived experiences effectively: bracketing and the hermeneutic circle.

A general overview of bracketing was provided earlier and an example of a bracketing interview was discussed (see pp. 58-61). When interpreting data from phenomenological

interviews, bracketing is a vital aspect of the process. Bracketing attempts to identify presuppositions that might influence the interpretation of the experience. Examples of such presuppositions might include the researcher applying her/his own standards of what constitutes an important or unimportant experience, judging a participant's reflections as illogical because they do not conform to some preestablished norm, or arguing that the "real" experience is not being described because it does not mesh with an imposed theoretical framework. To help in overcoming these obstacles the researcher can attempt two procedures. The first is to render the interpretation of the data in the participant's language whenever possible; the second is to conduct interpretation of the data in a group setting.

An interpretive group is composed of the researcher(s) and other individuals familiar with phenomenological methodology. The interpretive group can facilitate bracketing of the researcher's assumptions. A group of this kind can offer a broader perspective than a single individual and might notice a pattern or patterns that the individual did not notice. The group helps the researcher avoid focusing on one particular aspect of the transcript while failing to see others. Overall, the group can help the individual researcher deal with the sometimes-overwhelming task of interpreting large amounts of data, making the task more enjoyable.

In addition to bracketing, more accurate interpretation of interview text is facilitated by utilizing hermeneutic procedure, that is, a procedure in which there is a continuous process of relating a part of the text to the whole of the text. The so called hermeneutic circle (Palmer, 1969; Bleicher, 1980) overcomes the seemingly-linear character of reading by having an interpreter understand earlier portions of some text in relation to latter portions and, conversely, to understand latter portions in the context of preceding ones (Pollio et al., 1993). During the process of interpreting interview transcripts I utilized the hermeneutic circle in order to understand the parts and the whole.

To this interpret this type of data I implemented the logic of a hermeneutic approach in three ways: these were group interpretation, idiographic interpretation, and nomothetic interpretation. In group interpretation, the transcript of a particular interview are read aloud and there are frequent pauses to discuss the potential meanings and possible inter-relationships among meanings of a phrase or group of phrases. By reading the transcript aloud members of the group are able to gain a clearer picture of the nature of the data. After interpreting several transcripts in the group, I interpreted the remaining ones alone, although I did periodically return to the group with tentative idiographic descriptions. The group provided feedback as to whether or

not these themes seemed to describe the experiences accurately. This process closely resembled the external audit advocated by naturalistic researchers (Hanson & Newburg, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and an experienced qualitative researcher evaluates the interpretive process utilized by the researcher and to assess the trustworthiness of the study based on these interpretations.

Idiographic interpretation was the second hermeneutic principle used in the interpretation of interview transcripts for this study. This process involved taking each transcript as a case study and describing in thematic detail the experience of that particular individual. These descriptions provided a summary of interpretations such as relations and patterns of each interview.

The final implementation of the hermeneutic circle included the development of more nomothetic descriptions. This process required me to interpret each interview in relation to the whole and to all of the other interviews. By looking across interviews it was not my intention to seek generalizability; rather it was to improve on my interpretive vision in recognizing ways in which one experience resembles another. Once these nomothetic themes were determined they were not altered unless there was a specific example in one of the interviews to warrant it. Most importantly, a thematic description was done to capture what the experience of a "most memorable or meaningful" decathlon performance

meant for each participant and to render this meaning in the terms of the participant.

Issues of Validity

The validity of a study is an essential basis on which it is judged. In existential phenomenology, a study lacks validity if it lacks a first-person description of the phenomenon. Giorgi (1971) proposes that the key criterion of validity in qualitative research is whether a reader who adopts the same viewpoint as the researcher can see the same things the researcher saw whether she/he agrees with it or not. It is the researcher's duty to provide an appropriate description that allows someone else to see the same things. To help insure that this occurred I used rigorous and appropriate methods that produced plausible and illuminating insights into the experience of the participants (Pollio et al., 1993). Every attempt was made to accomplish this.

In addition to the methods mentioned in the previous paragraphs, I maintained a methodological log throughout the process of the study. It represented a chronology of my thought processes, reasoning and actions throughout the project. Daily entries were made in a separate computer file. These entries provided a way for me to reflect on my experience of the study and were helpful in keeping the study focused on the proper path.

In conclusion, echoing Kvale (1983) I feel the interview is the most effective means of attaining an in-depth understanding of another person's experience. In my view, sport psychology should not be dominated by the study of the third person as the natural scientists would have it, nor the first person as early introspectionists would have it, but should be free to pursue a second-person perspective where dialogue is the method of choice (Pollio et al., 1993). This is not to say that third and first person perspectives are not relevant, but second-person procedures are the most effective way to describe human experience. Unlike the third-person perspective that yields a psychology of strangers and a first person perspective that yields a psychology of solitary individuals, the dialogic method encourages the self and the other (the I and the you) to clarify for each other the meaning of their dialogue as it unfolds between them (Pollio et al., 1993, p.41). Not only does dialogue allow the participant the opportunity to describe experience, it also requires her or him to clarify its meaning, and perhaps even realize it for the first time.

The phenomenological interview was considered the most appropriate method for this study to describe the experience of these athletes. This method allowed the participants the opportunity to describe what occurred during those two days without a great deal of influence from me. The analysis of the data was inductive in that themes emerged from the data

the participants provided and various interpretive procedures such as bracketing, the hermeneutic circle, and an interpretive group helped insure a proper description.

Chapter IV

DATA PRESENTATION

The goal of this investigation was to provide a comprehensive description of the experience of elite decathlon participants during their "most memorable or meaningful" decathlon competition. Phenomenological interviews were conducted to arrive at such a description and this chapter presents a thematic structure of these experiences.

Before providing this structure, I will present a brief synopsis of each athlete's reasons for choosing the competition they did as their most memorable. While doing this and, in the remainder of this paper, I will refer to each athlete who participated in the study by a pseudonym. This was done to protect the identity of each participant as well as to provide the reader with names to associate with excerpts from the dialogues. This will assist the reader in getting a better feel for the experience these athletes have described.

Why These Performances Were Memorable

The following paragraphs contain brief descriptions of each decathlete's experience together with reasons for selecting the performance as memorable despite not being their best performance according to score. These

descriptions are a result of the member checking letter I sent to each athlete concerning his experiences. I have received responses from each of the athletes and made all of the changes they suggested.

Chris

Chris indicated that his most memorable or meaningful competition was his first international competition. It was his most memorable or meaningful because he was as close to 100% prepared as he had ever been. He had a solid nine weeks of training before the meet and was in good shape for all of the events. His steps were on and he was like a "fine tuned machine" that was ready to go. He was extremely confident and he indicated that this allowed him to open himself up and take some risks.

Glenn

When I interviewed Glenn, he did not hesitate to describe one particular meet that stood out for him as being memorable because he had a broken foot from the very beginning of the competition. He indicated this competition taught him a great deal about himself as a person and his capabilities outside sport. He saw himself as a vessel for God in this competition and reported feeling that he had no real control over the injury; he simply had to accept the injury and go on. He also indicated that it was almost as if he was cooperating with destiny or a plan that God had for him. Glenn saw the pain as a test of his faith, which he

found difficult to accept at times. This is evidenced by the number of times he questioned God's plan in this situation that meant so much to him personally. Despite this, he was able to overcome the pain and doubt to perform well.

James

When I interviewed James about his most memorable or meaningful performance he talked about the NCAA Championships. This was a meet that he was favored to win, was confident in his ability to win, and did win. Even though he was picked to win, he was never the leader in the competition until the very end. He reported liking this situation because usually when he is in first place he feels more pressure and less in control. Another reason this meet was a memorable experience for James was because this was the last meet in which he had "real fun" competing in the decathlon.

Bill

In the interview with Bill, he said that his most memorable or meaningful decathlon competition was winning the NCAA championship. Going into the meet Bill felt he was well prepared and he had a tremendous support cast around him. He was getting a great deal of support from his community, his coaches and some other teammates who had qualified for the national meet. He was confident that day and knew what his goal was and that nothing would keep him from achieving it. He was not expected to win this competition and being able to

come back and win even though he was not favored, helped make this a memorable meet.

Mike

When I interviewed Mike about his most memorable or meaningful decathlon competition he discussed a meet at the Olympic Festival which he won. This competition was memorable because he was not favored to win as he was not considered to be as talented as some of the other competitors. It was also the biggest competition he had participated in up to that point.

Mike said that consistency was the key to doing well in the decathlon on those two days, and he was pretty much able to score within the realm of where he wanted in the ten events of that competition. He also said that he learned a valuable lesson from this meet and that was that he had to try to get better at focusing on himself rather than on the other competitors.

Joe

In the interview I conducted with Joe about his most memorable or meaningful decathlon, he indicated that there were so many it was difficult to talk about one. The competition he chose to talk about was the Olympic Games. He had finally made it to the Olympics after previous attempts had been thwarted because of injuries. He felt as though he had made it into an elite club of athletes when he qualified.

People he knew treated him differently as a result of making the team.

Joe had a nagging injury he was nursing going into this competition as well. He was not able to work out very much before hand and he felt this hurt him because he was "flat" during the first day of competition. He defined being flat as just not having that fire. "You just feel like no matter how hard you try, you can't run as fast as you should or jump as high as you can. You just don't feel the power."

Joe indicated that this meet was memorable also because he was pretty good at taking one event at a time and not letting a poor performance in one event carry over to the next. He was able to get mad at himself or do whatever it took to deal with the mistake, learn from it and then move on to the next event. He was able to focus on the positive aspects of his performance and utilize them to build upon in the next event.

Bob

Bob indicated that his most memorable competition was a meet that took place in Europe after the regular competitive season had ended. It was rainy and there were strong head winds, which were not ideal conditions to compete in a decathlon. He had a very high score despite the weather conditions and having only one PR out of all ten events indicated to him how important consistency was in the decathlon.

Thematic Structure

The overall structure of these interviews consists of four major themes which include "The 1500", Distractions, Awareness of the Need to Recognize and/or React to Distractions, and Focusing. The themes and sub themes in this investigation are not individual pieces or parts, rather they should be viewed as aspects of a unified and undivided gestalt (Koelln, 1987/1988). In addition, one aspect of each theme may have been more figural for one decathlete than it was for another. I have presented these themes in a diagram to show this relationship (Figure 2).

This figure represents the experience of the participants in the study by demonstrating how the 1500 meters is continually in the background. The points of the triangle represent the other three themes in the experience of the athletes in the present study and how any one of the themes can relate to the others.

The first theme in the overall structure addresses the one event (the 1500 meters) of the competition that is representative of all other nine events and the things that take place during these events as well as the time in between events. The second theme relates to how the decathletes in this study were able to perform in a memorable fashion despite a multitude of distractions that occurred at various times throughout the experience. These distractions include an awareness of: (1) Level of Talent; (2) Lack of Confidence;

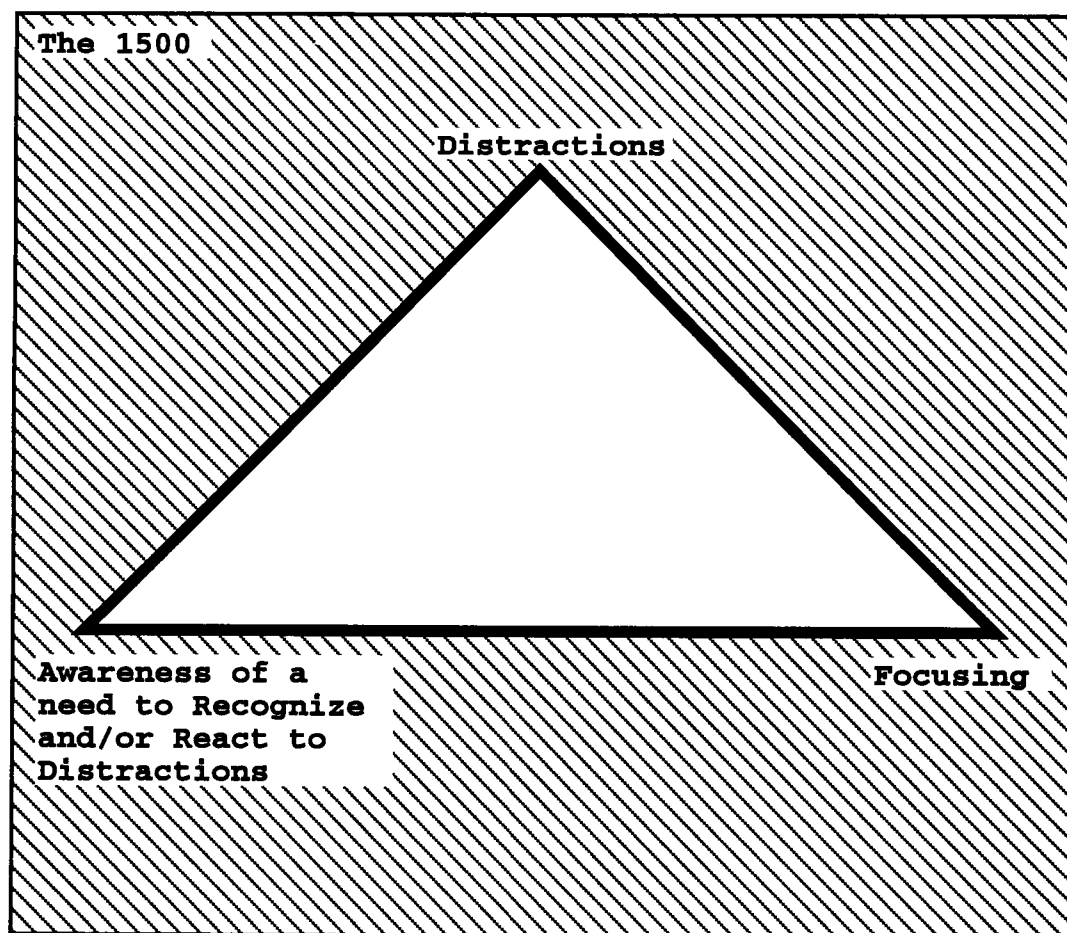


Figure 2. Diagram of the relationship between major sub themes in the experience of the athletes in this study.

(Preparation); (3) Fatigue; (4) A Bad Event; (5) Pain; (6) Fear; (7) Weather; (8) Other Competitors; and (9) Camaraderie.

The third major theme in the overall structure concerns an Awareness of the Need to Recognize and/or React to Distractions. In this theme the athletes described an awareness of needing to get rid of distractions and to focus more on what they are trying to do at that particular time. Therefore, this theme includes two sub themes (1) Getting Rid of Distractions and (2) The Need to Focus.

The fourth major theme in the overall structure is termed Focusing, and it includes various strategies the decathletes utilized to help them get rid of the distractions and narrow their focus on what they wanted to do in order to perform to the best of their abilities. The sub themes of this theme include (1) Imaging/Visualizing, (2) Being Aware of Keys, (3) Competing Only Against the Self, (4) Confidence as a Result of Proper Training, (5) Consistency, and (6) Camaraderie (Table 3).

Theme 1. The "1500"

The 1500 meter run is the last event of the decathlon. It was described as the most difficult of the events for these athletes because they experienced it as requiring them to run a very challenging event at the end of the second day

Table 3 Listing of themes and sub themes

<u>Theme I.</u>	The "1500"
<u>Theme II.</u>	Distractions
	A. Level of Talent
	B. Lack of Confidence (Preparation)
	C. Fatigue
	D. A Bad Event
	E. Pain
	F. Fear
	G. Weather
	H. Other Competitors
	I. Camaraderie
<u>Theme III.</u>	Awareness of a Need to Recognize and/or React to Distractions
	A. Getting Rid of Distractions
	B. A Need to Focus
<u>Theme IV .</u>	Focusing
	A. Imaging/Visualizing
	B. Being Aware of Keys
	C. Competing Only Against the Self
	D. Confidence (Proper Training)
	E. Consistency
	F. Camaraderie

when much of their energy has been spent. The 1500 is 100 meters short of four complete laps around the track. Many of the athletes included in this study have the ability to run this distance in under 4 minutes and 30 seconds. Despite this, all reported having to contend with the 1500 from the very beginning of the competition and much of what the athletes reported doing in each of the events was done with the 1500 in mind.

The athletes reported being aware of the fact that the 1500 is part of the decathlon and that they know they had to run it to finish the competition. Joe described his experience of the 1500 during his most memorable decathlon as something he knew he had to do, and was willing to run it hard if needed.

Then it came down to the 1500, a lot of people hate it, everybody hates it I think, just because it's kind of hard, it is going to hurt and nobody likes pain and especially since you have to put yourself through the pain. But it's part of every decathlon and it's just part of it, so if you don't want to do decathlon, don't do it. But you better be prepared for it and you better want to run it. At the end, one of my things is "if I have to run the 1500, I'll run the 1500," because I don't know how or why but I can deal with the pain or whatever.

Other athletes talked about their continual awareness of the 1500. It was always looming in the background and they talked of their fear of having to run it. For some of the athletes this fear helped motivate them to do well in the

other events. Chris discussed this fear as early as the 400-meter race on the first day.

Going into the 400 there was fear. Plain old fear, that I needed to get my lead back because Joe Smith had an excellent javelin and a good 1500 to finish with. I think I do a lot of things well because I fear having to run a certain time in the 1500, when it comes down to it.

He also discussed this fear again during the pole vault. He was not sure of his ability to run the race well and he wanted to do well in the vault to take off some of the pressure of having to run a fast race in the 1500 meters.

There's definitely a fear factor there. I remember going for the world record, I remember jumping at 5 meters and I thought I need this or the 1500 is going to be horrible. Because you just don't know it, it's an event that's unproven all the time. Unless you run 4:15 on a regular basis, you just don't know what it's going to take.

The 1500 meters was also a metaphor for the entire competition. Many if not all of the different aspects of the experience these athletes described during each of the other nine events were also present in the 1500 meters. There were distractions, a need to recognize or react to these distractions, and they had different strategies to get rid of the distractions and focus on what they could control. This theme will be addressed further in a later section of this chapter which includes themes from all ten events of the decathlon.

Theme 2. Distractions

When asked to describe their most memorable or meaningful decathlon competition, participants in this study talked about competitions where they had the ability to overcome various problems and/or distractions to perform well. All of the decathletes in this investigation had competitions where they scored higher, yet these meets were not discussed as memorable because the distractions and problems were not as numerous and were easier to overcome. For example, the weather might have been ideal or maybe all of the other competitors performed well on those two days as well. Each participant was able to discuss a particular competition that stood out as memorable or meaningful for him. James discussed this by noting:

This meet wasn't my best point-wise. The meet where I had the most points, all of my events went well. Everyone's events went really well that meet. That was a meet where we set an American record where we had eight Americans score over 8000 points. I was having a great meet but it didn't seem that great because everyone else was having a great meet. It was just perfect conditions. Perfect day and everybody was ready. I did my best, but everyone else did their best so my best didn't seem that great. It was great for scoring, but you wish you could do it on that day and they could have done it another day. That meet was a highlight for me because I had my highest score and I placed fairly well, but it wasn't my most memorable. It is a shame because you would like for your best score to be your most memorable meet.

By the nature of its design the decathlon is potentially full of distractions to overcome each time the person competes. As Bruce Jenner put it in earlier excerpts, the

decathlon is like a high wall that is difficult to climb and unforgiving when you fall.

Level of Talent

The athletes who participated in this study are the best at what they do in the United States and several are among the best in the world. Their perception, however, was that they are not as fast or strong as some of the other competitors. Whether they are actually less talented than the other competitors or not, the fact that they were even thinking about it created a distraction. This distraction was an obstacle these athletes perceived they had to overcome to be competitive.

Mike alluded to this when he described his feelings of being less talented than some of the other competitors. He emphasized that he was successful because he worked hard and was competitive.

I guess every time I place in the top ten in the US championships I really feel like I've achieved something. Because personally I feel I'm not near the athlete that all these other guys are. I can't jump as high as them, I can't run as fast as they can, I can't really do anything but I find a way to be competitive so anytime I rank in the top ten I think "boy I'm doing something." I'm really proud of that and that I'm at that level because I never thought I'd make it.

Chris also felt he wasn't as talented as some of the others. He emphasized that he has worked hard for several years to get where he was at the time of this competition.

I'm not the strongest, the biggest, my technique's not the best, but I've worked at it hard enough to be the best jumper, the fastest person. But I wasn't always the fastest, I was always the shortest, I was always the skinniest kid. So things change over a period of years, and people don't see those changes right away, but two or three years down the road you're gonna be big enough to play linebacker or be a decathlete.

Bob described his feeling of being less talented in a specific race. He was aware that several of the other competitors were faster than he was. He indicated that he just wanted to stay close.

I knew most of them were fast and I just wanted to keep myself as close as I could. There were several people in there that were better.

These athletes might have indicated that they felt they were not as talented as the others to help make their most memorable performance even more memorable. As stated earlier, if they are thinking about being less talented during the competition it can be a substantial distraction.

A Lack of Confidence (Preparation)

Being prepared to compete was very important to these athletes. Often, the reason they could not train and prepare like they wanted to was because they were physically injured and had to abstain from doing the physical work it takes to prepare them for competition. This was a very difficult time for them and when they were competing it was a distraction if they were not confident they were well prepared.

Glenn emphasized discouragement with his inability to train like he wanted before his most memorable performance.

So I basically took that whole period off, swam a little, lifted weights and prayed a lot for strength through pain, the whole month before the Olympic games. It was hard not to train and not to get myself completely ready, mentally know that my body was completely ready. It was really discouraging at times and it had an effect on my confidence in that meet.

Joe discussed a similar situation as he described what it was like to have an injury before the competition. He emphasized the effect of not being able to work out had on his performance. He felt "flat" or like he had no bounce in his legs at the beginning of the competition.

After the first day, Bill and I both didn't have very good first days, we thought "this sucks and this is the Olympics, you're supposed to be all fired up!" One thing I think contributed is that I pulled my hamstring about seven days out, actually about ten days out, at a training center in France. I could keep on training up to the Olympics and risk pulling it for good, or I could rest and get healthy, but maybe not sharp. And that's what happened. That slight pull and all that rest, ten days after was nothing. I didn't do anything until the day before, when I went out and jogged around and did some steps, you know. So that's what happened. I ended up flat.

There are other times when a decathlete simply does not have the opportunity to train like he wants. It has nothing to do with an injury, but still affects the athlete's confidence in his ability to perform the way he wants or up to his perceived potential. Mike alluded to this when he described his experience before he ran the 400-meter dash.

I didn't train very much at all in the fall like I always have in the past. So I was somewhat worried because I ran one of my worst quarters at the US Championships a little while before this competition. I kept thinking about how unprepared I was and that had an effect on me.

In a similar fashion James did not feel prepared for a particular event and was concerned about how well he would perform.

I had alot of other things going on the year before and I knew that I hadn't prepared like I should have. I had been training horribly and was a little nervous about how I would do.

A lack of preparation for various events created a distraction for these athletes. It was difficult for them to compete well when they were occupied by their lack of preparation.

Fatigue

Just the sheer amount of time it takes to compete in a decathlon creates difficulties in the athlete's ability to be tough enough to endure. The amount of time these athletes spend competing over two days creates the inherent barrier of fatigue. If broken down into the actual time an athlete competes during a decathlon it would be less than thirty minutes; the time in between events, however makes the total time on the site more formidable. In most decathlon competitions there are at least thirty minutes between events and in international competition the interval is often much

longer. Much of this is due to the larger number of competitors at international competitions and each event has several flights or heats.

Other factors also contribute to the length of time the athletes are out on the field. Joe alluded to this state of affairs by discussing his frustration with the judges and their inability to be organized. Such disorganization increases the normal time between the discus and the pole vault to several hours.

We went to the pole-vault and the referee was completely incompetent. They couldn't get the bar up for practice. We were supposed to go at like 1:30 or something. We didn't go till 3:30 because they couldn't get the bar up. They kept putting it up, it would fall down. They'd put it up, it would fall down. So the fans started booing the meet officials. It was hilarious. After a two hour delay because of how long they fumbled around, by the time we got there, they didn't even have the pits ready. So we had to wait for them to get them ready. Then we had to wait for them to figure out how to do it. By the time everybody got to their warm-ups, it was two hours late.

This time in between events contributes to the fatigue of the athletes as much as than the competition itself. When asked to describe his experience toward the end of the second day, Joe explains that he is an experienced decathlete and he knows that fatigue is just part of it.

For me, I've been doing it so long, I just know that when it comes time to compete, I know it's going to happen. Of course you're tired, you're supposed to be tired: you're doing the decathlon. If you weren't tired, you'd be unbelievable. You're only human, you gotta be tired. You've been giving full effort for 6, 7 events over two days and I don't know how many hours,

and that's part of it. When it comes down to that point that you're tired, you just keep on going. You focus on what it is you have to do.

James attributes a less than expected performance in the hurdles to fatigue from the first day.

I didn't have a good race. It wasn't horrible, I just felt like I ran alright, but my time wasn't all that good. It was probably fatigue from the first day. Um, I just didn't feel really on or sharp. I was a little worn down.

Fatigue is a distraction that these athletes had to deal with throughout much of the competition they recalled as memorable. This fatigue became more and more figural as the competition progressed, especially toward the end of the second day. The fatigue created a distraction that they had to overcome to perform well. In this particular competition, the athletes were able to do this.

A Bad Event

The decathlon is a unique competition in that a competitor can have a less than desirable performance in a particular event all the way up through the 1500 and still have the opportunity to make up for it at a later time during that competition. Unlike single track and field events, the decathlon is somewhat forgiving if a person does not perform up to their capability in one particular event.

It is difficult for these athletes to be exceptional in all ten events. In their description of their most memorable

competitions the athletes talked about their ability to overcome a bad event by "leaving it behind" and not letting it affect the rest of the competition.

Bill indicated that he had a bad event in the shot put and dealt with it by reminding himself that he usually has one bad event during a competition and there are ten events and he could still make up for it later.

The shot wasn't good and I kind of used my technique but it didn't work and I was like, well I know what I have to do now I have ten events. There's always going to be one event that's not quite up to par.

James discussed how he tried to overcome a bad event and utilize it to help him do better on the next event. He didn't completely forget about it, but rather dealt with it in a positive manner.

If I have a bad event I try to forget about it, not really forget about it but I try to use it to help me do better in the next event. A lot of athletes try to stay away from it completely and their coaches say stay away from it completely. I think that is negative or bad to just completely forget about it. I think that I had a bad event and I can go out and make up for it.

Joe also indicated that he had to get the bad event out of his system in a controlled manner. He didn't necessarily want to forget about it nor did he want to get over aroused because of it. Instead, he felt it was important accept it so he could move on to the next event. The following excerpt is his discussion of how he handled a less than desirable performance in the shot put

I had to get it out of my system. You need to get mad or get sad, or whatever it is you do, but you have to do it controlled, not kick a wall and break your foot, do something to get disqualified, or carry on with such a tantrum that you're going into the next event sweating and all fired up. You have to do it in a controlled manner and then put it behind you. You can look at it in a positive, or not positive but motivational manner, "gosh, I screwed up on that," boom. Get mad, get sad, now focus on what do I have to do next. I was able to do that pretty well after the shot put.

Things are often made worse when an athlete has a poor performance in an event and he watches another athlete do well in the event. This makes it more difficult to deal with a bad event and move on without thinking about how poorly he has just performed. Bill described how this felt when he was in this position.

There are times when you're maybe stuck on the track and watching someone and he's going nuts on the track, and it's "oh, man, it sucks!" but you have to be able to say "let's get away from this event and on to the next!" You have to be able to turn off what just happened. Feed off the positive energy, feelings. If it's a negative thing, you have to realize what happened and turn off the negative side of it. You have to be able to leave an event behind you. A lot of people can't do that, they go to the next event carrying negative feelings, carrying this pissed off feeling, so they're not totally focused on what it is that they have to do. They're also focused on how the last event went. That just comes with experience.

Having a bad event in the decathlon does not mean the athlete is completely out of the competition. At times these athletes had difficulty dealing with a bad event in a positive manner and to better accomplish this they often talked to themselves and reminded themselves to look forward to the next event. What had happened was over.

Pain

Pain was a distraction discussed by all participants at one time or another. Three participants, seemed however, to be aware of pain more than the others. The following excerpts from the dialogue are examples of their experience of pain.

The pain for Glenn was evident throughout his description of the decathlon. This particular excerpt describes the extent of the pain and how it affected him emotionally.

The pain was getting really bad. It was almost unbearable at times and I was afraid again that I wouldn't be able to run like I needed to. There was so much doubt, fear and questioning all at the same time. I was questioning what I was doing out there with so much pain. I was going to make a fool of myself.

Pain was figural for Chris during the initial segments of the 400 meter run. He was afraid of the pain that he felt was inevitable at the end of the race. He reminded himself of the training he had done to prepare him for this race and it seemed to help.

And that's one fourth of the way through your quarter. And then 100 meters and you've got three to go and it hurts, but it's still working properly, you're just dealing with the pain. How bad can I stand the pain?" It hurts and it doesn't matter how fast, and you're trying to do a certain time and it's just that kind of stuff that you do to acquire the mental toughness. I just told myself that I had trained hard and that it wasn't going to hurt more than that. The race went

really smooth and at the end where I usually have all of that pain I was feeling great.

Joe experienced most of his pain before the event began. He had been injured and was not able to practice very much for this competition. Even though the pain was not intense throughout all of the competition like it was for Glenn, Joe experienced some pain. The pain was significant because he was aware of it before the 100 meters and felt it was detrimental to his first-day performance.

I hadn't been able to train and I was concerned the pain in my hamstring was going to bother me in the 100. Yeah, I was definitely aware of it before the race and I think that kept me from being as aggressive as I should have been. I was just really flat for most of the first day.

In most physical sports like the decathlon, pain is an accepted reality. These athletes experienced pain throughout various times in their "most memorable" performance and had to find ways to deal with it in order to perform well.

Fear

Fear is a distraction these athletes experienced in a variety of ways. As mentioned earlier under the theme of the 1500 meters, Chris feared having to run the 1500 meters fast. All of the other events were contested with him knowing the better he did in those events the slower he could run in the 1500 meters. He was afraid, and it was a distraction for

him. Chris elaborated on this by describing his fear of the pain he thought was inevitable.

That's what you fear. You fear that pain and stiffness creeping in, like "am I going to be able to handle it? Am I in shape enough? Am I warmed up enough?" So when it happens, it isn't always easy to deal with. You have these fears in your mind like "my legs are going to fall off," or something crazy like that. But, it never happens like that.

Glenn was also fearful of the pain he thought he would experience while running the 1500. He had an injury and had been given medication to suppress the pain in his foot. He was worried that he would not be able to feel it if his foot got worse.

I couldn't feel my foot hit the ground and I was afraid that my foot was going to be much worse. I had this image of those race horses who are so doped up that they don't know when their leg is broken and keep running. I was fearful of that happening to me. I had plain old fear going into it.

Another time when fear or worry was a distraction for these athletes was when they were afraid of fouling. In the decathlon a competitor is allowed three fouls in the field events and three false starts in the running events before he is disqualified. In the running events this is usually not a factor, although in the field events a fear of fouling or "no heighting" (which is where an athlete does not successfully clear an opening height in the high jump or the pole vault) can cause a great deal of anxiety and keep the athlete from performing to his potential.

There is a possibility of fouling on all three attempts in the long jump, shot put, discus, and javelin. This would occur if an athlete stepped over a designated line in the javelin or the long jump. And, it would occur if an athlete stepped out of the circle while throwing the shot put or discus. Many times athletes are very conservative on their first attempt to insure that they get a mark.

In the high jump and the pole vault the athletes have an opening height in mind and usually enter the competition at the highest height they feel they can clear with ease. This is a chance they have to take. It is somewhat of a trade-off because the higher they start, the fewer attempts they will have to make and the less energy they will have to expend. Bill describes his experience of the fear of "no heighting" in the high jump.

I just had this fear and I started real low to make sure I wouldn't miss. I didn't like being afraid of fouling but I was and that was something I had to deal with. I just entered at a height that I knew I could clear and that helped give me confidence.

Chris described his experience of the fear of fouling in the discus. He had been throwing well in practice and previous competition, but he was afraid of fouling, which caused him to be tentative.

The discus was an event that I thought was going to go very, very well. I had thrown a personal best early in the season, and I was just afraid of fouling. So I didn't really go after the throws like I should have.

In the discus I was really withdrawn and safe, instead of competing. That happens sometimes, but if you've got the ball and there's 12 seconds left on the clock, nothing but a lay-up! Nothing but a lay-up! You want to be able to go for it. There's that element in every sport. I like to get a good first throw and then relax, I can go and get free and flowing and start throwing better on my second and third. Taking chances, putting a little more juice on the end of your throw. That kind of feeling makes me think I'm not quite as prepared as I'd like to be.

Fear was a distraction these athletes experienced at different times during the competition. They all had different events or situations in which they were fearful of not doing what they thought they were capable of doing. Whether it was a fear of the pain they might experience in an event because of an injury, the event itself (which is often the case in the 1500 meters), or a fear of fouling, these athletes experienced it as a distraction they had to overcome.

Weather

One factor that all athletes must contend with when competing outside is the weather. The weather is something these athletes had no control over and yet it often had a significant impact on their preparation and performance. For most of them the weather conditions were not ideal during their most memorable performance, yet they were able to perform well despite this distraction.

Bob was competing in a foreign country and had arrived several days before the competition to adjust to the time change and weather. The weather was significantly different than what he was used to where he trained in the United States. It was difficult for him to adjust.

England is real cloudy and gloomy all the time, a lot of rain. I was depressed after about four days because we'd seen the sun and it's hot and nice weather around here and it was cool and cloudy and rain and I was like depressed and let me out of here.

The weather continued to be a distraction for him once the competition began. He was especially aware of the wind and rain in the long jump and the pole vault.

It was rainy and headwinds and stuff. It was very difficult to get a good attempt in the long jump and the vault.

Bill also had difficulty with the wind. Normally the officials coordinating a meet will allow the competitors to compete in an event with the wind at their backs. In this particular meet the winds were not consistent and the judges were not always able to have the events with the wind.

I remember there was -- we had some really crazy winds. The winds were never consistent whenever you get in those stadiums that are kind of like -- you never know what to expect from the wind.

Mike provided an example of how weather conditions played an important role in his most memorable performance. He had competed at a much higher level at another meet, but the conditions were ideal for a good score and he did score

well. In his most memorable performance he did well despite the weather.

The meet that my personal record (PR) came, we had great winds, everything was ideal to have a great score. This meet we had bad weather as far as it was so damn hot.

Each of the athletes who discussed the weather during the interviews remembered it because the conditions were not conducive to a good performance. The fact that they were able to overcome the distraction of poor weather conditions and still perform at a certain level provided a sense of accomplishment and made the performance memorable.

Other Competitors

Throughout their descriptions of their most memorable performances the decathletes revealed how complex the comparison with the other competitors is for them. Ideally each of them would like to focus on himself and not really worry about what the other competitors are doing; in reality they are very aware of the others involved in the competition. There are times when this awareness of and comparison to the other competitors is a distraction for them. The decathletes also indicate that there are times when being aware of another helps push them. This usually occurs in running events and examples of this will be given later. At this time, awareness of other competitors is described as distracting.

If participants were aware of what the others were doing they were not able to focus exclusively on themselves as they had indicated they would like to do. James talked about how difficult it was to not think about the other competitors before a race.

I remember getting there and there were some really good throwers in there. I try not to think about that but it is hard not to when you know how everyone can run.

When asked to describe their experience of being aware of the other competitors, several participants indicated that it is just part of the competition. Bob indicated that he liked to be aware of how well the others were doing because it let him know where he stood and he could use that information to project how he should be able to do on the second day.

I was in pretty good condition as far as the others and the ones that were ahead of me were ones that were at the World Championships. I was trying to think, okay where are they compared to where they were then when they beat me. I knew what I could do the next day and I knew my discus had improved a tremendous amount in the last two weeks since the World Championships. I knew I was running hurdles well, my vault was doing fine, my javelin was getting back to where it was, I knew I could run a fast 1500, so I knew the second day was solid and I could make up ground with everybody on the second day. I just had to get within striking range with two to three events to go.

Mike explained that being aware of the others was his way of "sizing up" the competition. He knew that he couldn't control what the others were doing, but he felt it helped his

confidence to know he was better than those he was competing against.

I mean it's not because you can control what they do but you're always sizing up your competitors. If you compete overseas or something against an international team there's always guys that you never know what they can do. You may see them do a great 100 meters although they may have had four or five terrible runs coming up but you don't know. You've got all that anxiety of, oh my god, look how fast he is, look how strong he is and I knew what everybody's capabilities were at this meet. I knew that I had the opportunity to win if I performed to my ability and like I said before you can't control what they do -- you can only do your own thing but you're always sizing up the guys next to you and wondering what they can and can't do. In this case I knew what they could do so therefore I didn't have to worry about what.

Although it may appear as though it was helpful to be aware of the other competitors and what they were doing, the athletes in this study indicated that they really didn't want to be aware of them. They wanted to be aware of themselves and not compare themselves to the others and what they were doing. Not being able to do this created a distraction for them to have to overcome.

Camaraderie

The way the decathlon is designed there is a great deal of time for athletes to get to know each other as something other than someone to compete against. Much like being aware of other competitors, the camaraderie decathletes in this study experienced with each other was a distraction as well as something that helped them at various times throughout the

competition. This was a distraction because it was a dilemma for them due to the fact that it was sometimes difficult for some of them to separate friendship and competition.

Other athletes felt the camaraderie only to a certain extent. For these athletes, when it comes to larger more important meets like the World Championships and the Olympic Games the relationship with the others takes on a different meaning. It is something they try to turn off and compete without that closeness.

The fact that all of these athletes are members of a team sponsored by the same corporation helps foster a close knit group. This corporation coordinates camps for the athletes to attend and learn from experts in various events of the decathlon while spending some time together as a group. Some of the experiences described by these decathletes occurred before they were members of this team. No matter when the experience happened, it makes for some interesting situations when a person must compete against a friend in competitions where the livelihood of both is in the balance.

James provided a good example of the complexity of the relationship when he discussed the camaraderie he felt with his fellow competitors.

But I remember that day we kind of drifted in and we all pretty much knew each other because we compete against each other all of the time and we are all pretty good friends. Every decathlete I meet I feel like he is a friend. They are all just great people. I don't think

I have ever met one that wasn't. I don't know why because some of the other events have people that can't stand each other. In the decathlon, I don't know if it is because we share the same experience and we are with each other for two days while we compete rather than the 100 where you are with each other for 10 seconds and you go separate ways. But it is always great to see the guys again and be together and compete with them when you see them. I think we are all good friends and that is probably one of the most important things about my decathlons is the people I have met, places I have seen and the friends I have made. But, I have always tried to stay away from making a social function out of the decathlon. I used to do it before and it always seemed to ruin my decathlon because I really couldn't focus on what I was doing. A lot of people, they are out there really enjoying themselves and trying to catch up on what they have been doing. I just try get by myself and alienate myself during the actual competition. Afterwards we are the best of friends still. And if they want me to catch their mark or tell them something about their form I will help them out any way I can, but I still consider myself competing against them. I don't want them to do bad, it is just that I am competing against them and they are competing against me. So lets just save the social function for later. It was really good to see them but I tried not to dwell on it. A lot of people do dwell on it and I have never seen them do well in that case because they are so excited about seeing someone that they don't worry about their decathlon. I have always tried not to do that and some people have said that they didn't like to be around me during the competition. But, it is just that I didn't have anything to say to them at the time. It is hard to separate the two, but I try to do it when I am competing.

Being able to distinguish between friend and competitor is a difficult thing for James to do at times and he struggles to overcome it. Bill experiences the same difficulty and has been told by others that he is too friendly during the competition.

The one thing about -- like the _____ program -- it's great because it brings us all together and it's like a big family and in a way I mean it's obviously

positive. It's the best thing that's happened to me. It enables me to keep training -- I won't ever knock it but everyone has a friendship now that you start to carry in the meet and I think for myself personally maybe I carry it in a little too far into the meet. Because my wife and my brother-in-law who have seen me compete before and they're like, man, you're too friendly with these guys, it's nice that you guys are friends and you're on the same team but -- there's not a lot but there's money on the line -- there's a lot that goes into this stuff and you better get serious.

Joe talked about one particular athlete whom he had competed with in other meets through the years and had become very good friends with.

Jack Monday and I, he's from Townville, he and I had competed all through college together. We are pretty good friends.

Adding to this type of thinking, Bob described his willingness to help competitors from other countries with their steps or give them advice in different situations that might help them do well.

It's amazing in the decathlon you find it a lot -- in the other events you don't find it at all. I'll help out -- someone catch their step or help them out if I see they're doing something wrong because I'm friends with most of the guys I compete with. And I'll even help out guys from other countries.

Glenn indicated that his most memorable experience was at the Olympic Games. In his description of this experience he indicated that it was good to have other members of the US team there with him, but competing at a meet as important as the Olympic games altered the camaraderie he felt with them. More was at stake for him at the bigger competition and he

only felt camaraderie with the other guys to a certain extent.

It was good to have the other team members there, but it's so much different, there's so much more pressure. You have USA on your chest and you try to help each other out, but the mental picture is far greater of where you are, and you tend to really try to focus on yourself more, try not to goof around too much. At the Olympic games, there's a chance for the other Europeans to do a Tonya Harding on you. It's definitely different there; it's a different place, a different meet. It's different from the World Championships. You'd be a little more relaxed there because you know it's not a meet that's a career meet. I mean, people will forget about that meet the next year. But you remember the Olympic games and if you win, it's remembered forever.

Being an experienced competitor has allowed Joe to have a certain insight into the camaraderie among decathletes when competing. In his description of his experience of camaraderie he indicated the complexity of competing against someone he might consider a friend.

In the Olympics, Fritz Schmidt caught my long jump step, and I caught his. He's from Germany. I've been doing this so long, I know a lot of these guys. We've become pretty good friends, I help them, they help me. A lot of times they don't ask, I'll ask sometimes, sometimes they ask. It's kind of a weird situation because you want to beat the guy, and you don't want to see him miss because you know him and want him to do his best, but then if he makes that, I have to work harder! It comes down to that point sometimes, but you're not going to do anything to hurt him.

Camaraderie is a difficult experience for these athletes to deal with when competing. Some participants seemed to have a better grasp of how to handle competition with people they considered friends. However, with the way the decathlon is designed and the friendships that are formed, it becomes a

distraction when a person has to compete against someone he is helping out and trying to defeat at the same time.

Throughout their experiences these athletes were aware of a need to recognize and/or react to these distractions. In the next few paragraphs I will provide excerpts from the dialogues that will provide insight into their awareness of the need to react. Once that has been provided, I will provide specific strategies used to help them focus their attention in a different direction once they were aware of a need to react or recognize the distractions.

Theme 3. Awareness of a Need to Recognize and/or React to Distractions

These athletes were extremely aware of a need to recognize or react to the various distractions they experienced throughout their memorable competition. They have been coached by some of the best coaches and the athletes themselves have a great deal of experience. Several athletes used similar terms to describe their reactions to various distractions. The strategy was to be able to "rid themselves of the distractions" and to focus on what was relevant during that particular event.

In the following paragraphs several examples of the athletes' awareness of the need to react or recognize the distractions are provided. One area that the athletes are aware of is a need to narrow their focus to a few specific

things when in the process of competing in an event. When they are aware of the distractions they report feeling as if they are unable to focus on the relevant aspects of the current event.

Bill described his experience of thinking too much about technical aspects of the shot put. He was aware that he was too mechanical and was conscious of the fact that he was thinking about every aspect of the throw. He realized that overloading himself with too many thoughts would be detrimental in this event. When he did this, it did not allow him to "flow" like he wanted.

You can't think, okay I'm going to lower, then I'm going to extend both legs, I'm going to take the left arm, keep the shot put back, head up -- it happens too quick. That's one of the problems that I've had with Coach _____, not that he needs to do that but we have so many cues and technical things to worry about -- like Bill Jones saying, you lost the competitive side of you, you lost the competitive edge, you're just thinking about the stuff. It's funny because my mom and some of my old coaches are like, you're competing okay but you look so mechanical -- it's like instead of flowing and that flow that -- like when you throw sometimes you don't even have to look, you know you threw well and you jumped well and I haven't felt that for a while.

James indicated that he has actually blanked out in the ring when he was about to throw because he had so many things on his mind. He was aware that he needed to change this and tried to narrow his focus before he entered the ring. Viewing the throw like a practice throw seemed to be helpful.

A lot of decathletes will say that they will get into the ring and they just blank out, they don't remember

anything. I can remember that happening to me a couple of times in the shot put. I would get into the ring and my mind would go blank. I would have to think about what I was supposed to do. I would think "oh yeah I am supposed to turn in a circle and throw this thing." But it is a scary thing when you are in there and people are watching you and you want to do well and therefore you want to do it right. Usually when you blank out it is because you have so many things on your mind that you are trying to concentrate on, especially the technical events like the shot or the pole vault. You will just be there with so many things on your mind that you can't even think about the first thing or any of them for that matter. What I try to do is get focused before I get in the ring and I will walk in just like it is a practice competition throw.

Bob tried to gather his thoughts before his events. He was aware that he had to be specific in his thought process and attempted to stay away from the technical aspects of the event.

I'll take another minute or so to make sure I'm right with it. A lot of the events like the long jump, the shot and the throws and stuff are real aggressive type of events so when you're actually doing an event there's not a whole lot of real specific technical stuff to worry about because you're thinking too much and you're going to be slowed down. You can get away with that in some events and in some events you can't get away with it. You have to be more specific in your thought process.

The weather was a distraction for Chris and he was aware of a need to block it out of his mind and compete.

It was raining again, and I knew I was really going to have to block it out and say "I'm gonna run." I did it too.

For Mike being aware of the other competitors was a distraction and he reminded himself that he could only control what he was doing.

You watch what everybody else does and you're aware of it but, you can't effect it and you just have to do what you can do. Control what you can control and you can't control what anybody else does. I always try to remember that.

Chris was aware of a need to react to the potential distraction of camaraderie he might feel towards some of the other competitors. He wanted to win and, by helping others he would improve their chances to do well and take away from his chances.

There's good camaraderie out there and when you get it going between athletes, it's a very positive thing. But there's also a time to shut it off. I shut it off at both world championships. At the U. S. championships I feel it, I'm down with it and it's a lot of fun, I like talking with them and I'm rooting for guys, stuff like that. Anytime there's a major championship, I cut it off. I'll help you with your step, but it's never going to be "hey, buddy, let's go, you need this (height thing)." I need to win, you know. I was aware of not wanting to talk to the other guys too much.

Bill continued along the same lines as he discussed an awareness of the need to change the way he relates to the other competitors. He has to make some changes in order to be more competitive.

For me personally I think in order for me to make the big step to the next level scorewise, I'm going to have to make some changes and that might be one that I might have to -- I mean we can go out after the meet -- everyone have a good time, no -- we'll kid each other about a score or something but it's not really a big deal.

Glenn was in severe pain while he was competing. He was aware that this was a distraction and that he had to do

something about it to be able to deal with it. To do this he used imagery to "hone in" on the pain to get rid of it.

For me, getting mentally ready that day was to stand there and focus on the pain to start with. Focus right on it, know what it was, take a look at it, try to be that pain and be the bone that was injured. You gotta hone in on those things to know how to get rid of it. You've got to have mental images, a routine that brings out the most in your body.

It is important for Mike to be able to compete in an event and move on to the next event without thinking about what just happened. He is aware that he needs to try to do that, but it is very difficult for him.

I usually just talk to myself naturally because I've done so many meets now it's all secondhand a little bit and you just think, I'm shot putting now. The shot put is done, now the high jump. You've got to really be that way but you never are. You're always thinking back about what could have been and that's just second nature but it's real important to focus on what's happening now -- not to get ready for the next event or what happened behind you -- it's over. I know I have to do that and I am constantly trying to do it.

Finally, Joe sums up the need to react to or recognize the various distractions that occur during competition. He knows that he has to do what he has practiced and ignore the distractions.

You have to stick to the basics. It doesn't matter if you're in an ice storm or a heat wave, you have to do what you practiced. If people are booing you, I mean, we compete in a lot of situations where there are a lot of distracting things going on. You just have to be able to do your routine in any conditions. I struggle with that all of the time, but that is what competition is about. Those people who recognize the things that

take away from your concentration and do something about them are the ones who do the best in competition.

The majority of these athletes have been competing in the decathlon for many years and are able to recognize the distractions that usually occur during competition. They are also aware that they need to react to these various obstacles that have the potential to hinder their performance.

The next theme deals with the strategies these athletes used to handle distractions once they were aware of them.

Theme 4. Focusing

Once the athletes were aware of a need to recognize and/or react to a specific distraction, they had specific strategies they used to help narrow their focus or make things more simple. While narrowing their focus on what they felt was relevant, they used these strategies to help them get rid of the distractions.

The strategies these athletes described include: Imagery or Visualization; Being Aware of Keys, Competing Only Against the Self; Confidence (Proper Training); Consistency; and Camaraderie.

Imaging/Visualization

Imagery is a strategy that many athletes describe as being a useful tool in helping them perform well. It was important for the athletes in this study to visualize

themselves handling various situations throughout the competition.

In earlier themes it was made apparent that Glenn was in severe pain throughout his most memorable competition because of an injury he had sustained before the competition began. He provides a detailed description of how he used imagery to overcome the pain he was experiencing. He also used imagery to help get the adrenaline flowing in certain events that required a sudden burst of power.

So I thought of where the pain is and everything and then I said "okay, I'm going to take where that ball of pain was in my ankle, I'm going to set it over on the side. " So you mentally have a picture of something that's being taken away from you. So it helped a little bit. I also had to try to get the adrenaline flowing. In that situation I thought of life or death situations, like a little baby that's trapped under a car, that's going to die because the car's leaking gasoline and a flame, and if you don't pick that car up and throw it off this baby, the car's going to explode and the baby's going to die. So I try to think of that situation, the kind of adrenaline, the kind of force I would produce in that kind of situation. I try to build that in my mind and have that affect my body and then I go. It's a psychology I taught myself that the mind completely has the power to do just about anything, it really does. The only thing that .. actually, I'll take that back. The body has the power to do just about anything: the strength, the ability of the body is there to do just about anything. But what holds that back is the experiences that the mind has achieved throughout its existence, throughout its life. So when a person .. you've heard the story of a guy lifting a car off, or whatever, right? He didn't think about it; he just had to do it. There's nothing there to stop him. All he did was went straight ahead and picked up the car and pulled out of there. There was something more important than what his mind was telling his body to do. So that's the kind of thing I try to tap in on. I know the mind is the key that can bring out the most in the body. And if I can just get the mind to release the body's

potential, then I'm going to be that much better of an athlete.

Joe attempted to use imagery before an event to help him see and feel how he wanted his body to perform. It was difficult for him to image himself doing certain events in which he didn't perform well.

I go through an event in my mind before I do it. Probably the events I'm not that strong at, I probably don't do it. Sometimes I'm sure I have a negative attitude, like oh crap, here comes the long jump. I always do at my shot put, discus, pole-vault, high jump, very rarely long jump because I don't have a complete grasp of the long jump! I see myself outside my body and watch what I do. But I can force myself to do it from what I see. That's where I look for the keys. If I force myself to do it, this is what I'm going to see and feel, this is what position I should be in, like that. The images that I had at that competition were about like they are normally.

James talked about which view he takes when imaging himself competing in a particular event. He did it for all of the events and it was vivid for him because he actually felt his heart rate increase during times when he was imaging himself in a particular event.

I see myself from within, with my own eyes. I think that helps in respect to what I have to do, otherwise you would be like outside looking at someone else doing it. I never really thought about how I see myself perform, but whenever I see myself running down the runway I see the pole out in front of me. But, I think visualization was important and I did one day the first night and the second day one night before the competition. I do the whole decathlon in my head and I felt it helped me. I could actually feel my heart rate pick up when I was visualizing what I was doing. It made me more comfortable when I was actually in the meet having feeling like I had been through it before.

Chris emphasized that he talked himself through an event as well as visualizing it before he performed. He discussed the shot put and the discus specifically:

Mentally you can talk to yourself, you know, and say "you need to do this and you need to do that." But I visualize the throw or the jump before, couple cue words, you know we've got little sayings we do in the shot put and the discus.

Imagery was not mentioned as something these participants did much of away from the site of the competition. However, Mike described how he used his time at night to relax and see himself going through each of his events the way he would like to do them.

I spend a lot of time even now laying in bed at night, okay I'm in the blocks, I'm ready for the 100 meters, bam, the gun is off and I somewhat picture each event from time to time -- what it's going to take for me to have my best performance. I see myself doing things in my mind and I think that's important.

Being able to see themselves perform the way they wanted was important for these athletes. They discussed different reasons for using imagery, and while some of the participants seemed to be more proficient than others in their ability to have clear images, it helped them feel better about performing if they had been through it already.

Being Aware of Keys

The athletes in this study all had various keys or significant cues they tried to be aware of when performing.

Keys are specific aspects of performing a task that an athlete might utilize to assist her/him in achieving the desired outcome (e.g., an athlete might have a key phrase such as "extend" or "finish it" to make sure that she/he does what is needed at the end of the task to achieve the desired outcome). Having certain keys to focus on allowed them to narrow their attention to a few relevant aspects of the event they were competing in at the time.

Joe described how he was aware of different keys and that when he changed his keys things felt awkward. He emphasized that it was sometimes normal to feel awkward when he was changing bad habits into good ones. He also described what it was like to focus on just one key, and the importance of continuing to focus on that key during performance.

I'm learning those keys are very, very important. When I do things wrong, I have those keys, they're the wrong keys. When you do something that feels awkward, it's cause you're changing your keys. When you change the way you do your high jump approach, it feels comfortable to do it wrong. You feel comfortable with those keys, comfortable with the way you approach it. Now I'm changing my approach and have new keys, and it feels awkward, but I'm jumping much better. So I have to repattern my body and my mind to use these new keys. That is something that I am going to do in all of my events. It's what you see in your approach, it's what you think about, it's all of those things. It might be some kind of a landmark, some kind of thought you have at a certain time, it could be any of those things. It's a sense of something, at a point during your approach or your spin for your throw, that determines whether you're going to do it right or wrong. When things are off, it's probably because you're not doing your keys. You're not doing what you trained to do or you're not doing it correctly. If you do the same thing

everytime, and one key can make you do that, boom! You focus on that one thing.

Bill indicated that having specific keys to focus on helped him avoid other possible distractions.

If you're completely engrossed and focused on your keys and what you're supposed to be doing, you really can't be thinking about anything else.

Chris provided some specific examples of the keys he used in the pole vault, high jump, and the javelin.

All you have time to remember is "I'm three steps out, get your pole plant up." It's all anticipation. That's all the field events are. Here comes the long jump—anticipate jump. Here comes the throw—anticipate timing. Here comes the javelin, you rotate your shoulders. Those are just simple key words that you tell yourself to keep things simple.

Having specific keys to focus on helped these athletes get rid of the distractions that might otherwise keep them from performing well.

Competing Only Against The Self

As demonstrated earlier, one of the distractions that was evident in the descriptions provided by these athletes was that, at times they focused on what other competitors were doing rather than on themselves. They indicated that their ideal situation would have been to focus on themselves, and not concern themselves with others. They would like for the comparisons to involve themselves, namely what they have done in the past or what they know they are capable of. In some situations they were able to do this better than others.

Several of these examples are provided in the next few excerpts.

While discussing comparisons with the other competitors, Glenn indicated that he goes into the decathlon to compete against himself and what he has done before. Each time he competed in an event, he would compare it to his personal record. He felt if he could beat himself at his best then he would have arrived where he wanted to be.

I don't. I don't do that. I don't compare myself to what the other guys are doing. I step into the decathlon; I just go at it. I just do my very best, not really worrying how many points I'm gaining or losing. But as I was at the Olympic Games, I knew each time I ran, 11.1, I knew I was losing points compared to a 10.77. I was losing points away from my best, my PR. At the Olympic Games I wanted to at least do my best. Mainly against myself. I really wasn't thinking a whole lot about what the other guys were doing.

I want to beat myself, I want to beat myself at my best, and then I'll know that I've arrived at the goal type of score I've always wanted to.

Bob indicated that he tried to compare how he was doing to what he has done in the past and not with the other competitors. He knew he had to compete against himself in order to perform well each day.

I try to compare it more with what I've done in the past than other things.

If you're competing against other people there's going to be a lot of meets where you're not going to achieve what you want to achieve. The way the decathlon is set up with the scoring table and everything is, you have to compete against yourself and I try to keep the frame of mind -- if I go into the meet and do what I'm capable of doing -- whatever place I get will be good enough.

Mike and Chris talked of the importance of competing against themselves instead of the others. Chris indicated that when he did think about others it distracted him.

Mike

Obviously it's important to gauge yourself off of what you're doing, not everybody else.

Chris

I don't like to even consider other guys because it takes me out of my own mental game. I just basically try to deal with myself. I think that's why decathletes train alone a lot of times, because you're competing alone. You do compete with people sometimes, but you phase it out.

Joe, being the experienced competitor that he is, offered an account of his experience of comparison with the others. He was not aware of how the others were doing until the competition approached the end.

I don't care what people do, especially early in the meet because there's 10 events and he could have very easily gone to the high jump and no-heighted it. Or he could have pulled a hamstring in the quarter. So I go there to do my best; I hope everyone else goes there to do their best. And the winner walks away with it at the end, and boom, boom, boom, down the line.

Ideally these athletes indicated that they would like to have focused only on themselves throughout the entire competition. There were times they were able to do this, but the reality is that the comparison in the decathlon is complex and very often the athletes competed against the other instead of themselves.

Experience of Confidence (Proper Training)

Being confident in their training was a critical aspect of the experience of these decathletes. They spent many hours training for the different events of the decathlon. Training played a vital role in whether these athletes felt confident in their ability to perform well in competitive situations. Training also played a role in how consistent they were able to perform from day to day and event to event. If they had trained well they felt they would have a better opportunity to perform on a consistent basis.

A sub theme under the theme of Distractions was Lack of Confidence, which these athletes sometimes related to a lack of proper preparation. When these athletes talked of being aware of a lack of preparation they were not confident nor were they able to perform at a consistent level. The sub theme of Confidence under Focusing had the opposite effect of when the athletes felt they hadn't trained properly for a particular event. I will provide examples of how training affected the decathletes' ability to be confident, and this will be followed by excerpts from the dialogue that demonstrate the effect training had on consistency.

James described an experience of confidence because of his training, and he knew he was going to win because he had been training well prior to the meet. He felt simulating competitive situations in practice helped him feel additional confidence during the actual competition:

I had no doubt that I was going to win right before it happened because I had been training real well. I just kept telling him that I was going to win, I just knew it was going to happen.

The mental training that I discovered was the best was to train hard for each event because while you are training you practice the way you are going to compete. You simulate competition, but I think just by getting proficient in an event and getting confident with the event is the best mental preparation. Because when you get into the competition you feel secure with it.

According to Bob, proper training was important to him feeling confident on the two days of his most memorable competition.

Proper training helps so much. If you know you're ready then it takes a lot of the question marks out. If you know there's an event that you're not quite ready for, that you could have problems with, it's going to be on the back of your mind especially if it's a second day event because you'll be thinking about it all the first day, it's still coming up on the second day. If it's a first day event you kind of get it out of the way and you can kind of go on the rest of the meet. But you don't want to have any question marks because it's an unknown -- you don't want to have any unknowns. I was confident in my training leading up to those two days.

Chris also pointed out that the main reason he chose the World Championships as his most memorable competition was because he was as prepared as he could have been. He was very confident that his training had prepared him for overcoming distractions.

I think my most memorable decathlon ever was in the World Championships, because I went into the competition as close to 100% prepared as possible. I had a solid 9 weeks of training and I was in very good shape for all the events. My steps were on; everything was ready to

go. Physically my body was ready to go, mentally my body was ready to go.

I just had a lot of confidence. It was raining during the competition and I knew that, if it rained, I had a better chance of winning because the other guys might feel the effects of the rain. But I had the attitude that "it's raining, it's bad weather, somebody's gotta win, so I'm going to make the extra effort." Because the summer that I trained in wasn't great; we had some rainy days and stuff, headwinds in the pole-vault and things like that. I thought I had a little bit of an edge on those guys.

Bill was confident in his ability to do well going into the meet because his training had been going well and he had been working very hard. He also provided a descriptive metaphor for training that he drew confidence from during the competition.

But leading up to it I was training, busting my butt but everything was positive. I went to the meet knowing what I could do and you know I think back.

It is like your training is going well and you believe in whatever you're doing even if your coach is telling you your technique is wrong but you 100 percent believe in it. The training is going well, building up to a meet everything is positive then go to that meet and have all that stirred up is kind of like an analogy of having a lot of money in the bank -- you just keep putting money in, keep training, keep training, everything is building up and looking good at a good interest rate or whatever and then when it's time to withdraw you have all that money. You've worked hard, you've put it all in and when it's time to withdraw, just like at NCAA's that's what it was. Hey it's time to take the money out and jump.

Without the proper training it would have been very difficult for these athletes to feel confident in themselves during competition. Because they had been training well, the distractions were less of an obstacle to overcome. While

training was very important for the confidence of these athletes, it was also important for them to be able to perform on a consistent basis. Consistency played a large role in making these performances memorable

Consistency

It has been mentioned several times throughout this paper that the decathlon is a unique track and field event because the athletes are not necessarily striving for perfection in all ten events. This would be virtually impossible. While perfection is not always attainable, these athletes wanted to be consistent in their performance over the two day, ten-event period.

Bill noted the relationship for him between confidence and consistency. He didn't have to be great, just consistent. "Of course confidence, if you have the confidence you're going to be consistent."

Being inconsistent can be difficult to handle. James offered a clear description of its detrimental effects:

Consistency was the most important thing. If you start performing high in one area and low in another area it will tear you apart mentally. Consistency is something that all decathletes want, especially in those events where you can foul out. Let's say the pole vault is the number one concern for all decathletes because you know if you can be consistent there you have done three fourths of the meet and if you no-height you have lost the meet no matter where you are. The high jump is similar to the pole vault and you can foul out there easily as well. It isn't quite as technical, but you can definitely foul out. The discus can be one where

you can foul out of three times. So you look for consistency when you step in the ring. The shot put also. The running events are different. You want to be consistent, but you aren't going to foul out. You can always finish the race. It might not be the best time, but the pressure isn't there to not foul out or this could be the last event in this decathlon. Yeah consistency plays a major part and I think that is why we practice at being at a consistent level and then when we get into the meet we want to be above that consistent level. Consistency has always been good for me and that has helped me stay in the decathlon. I am not very erratic. My events are all pretty much even. Not all decathletes are like that and they are up and down. That throws you off mentally because you are thinking what if I had done this or done that. If you can stay at a consistent level you aren't surprising yourself one way or the other. I was consistent.

Joe and Chris spoke of the importance of being consistent in training. For them, if they could be consistent in their training it would translate over to consistency in competition. Joe explains:

I performed consistently because I had been training consistently. You have to know where you've been in your training and where you've progressed, and know where you're going. You have to be consistent with your training, too. I think too, if you haven't had good training, it's much harder on you mentally. It's easy for you to go "oh, man, I hurt," or "I didn't train for this, how am I supposed to do this?" Then your mind comes in and gets negative. The way you've been training is very important, mentally and physically.

Chris described the importance of consistency:

Oh, definitely, consistent in your training, consistent in your regimen, consistent in your competition. Your schedule is very good. How many times am I going to practice the pole-vault this week? That's the ability to feel confident about the consistency. Hey, I had three good practices—I'm not going to jump this week. Or I haven't jumped in six weeks, I'm not feeling really good, I've got a little twinge .. you know, you're not going to put it up if you aren't consistent in training. You are aware of those kinds of things when you are

competing. Being consistent in my training helped me perform well at that meet.

These athletes felt training was a vital component to them being consistent. They were able to perform at a consistently high level because they were confident in their training and their ability to compete. Confidence in their training helped them avoid some of the distractions that might have been present if they had not properly prepared themselves.

Camaraderie

This theme of camaraderie is in contrast to the earlier theme of camaraderie which was referred to as a distraction. In its distracting form the athletes revealed that the camaraderie they felt with the other competitors created a complex system of competitor-friend relationships.

In its facilitating form other competitors were experienced as friends who were able to pursue an outlet from the pressure of the competition. The athletes described such camaraderie as a way to keep themselves from becoming exhausted. Being able to relax with friends between events was experienced as allowing them to have a better focus on the event when it was time to compete.

Glenn described camaraderie as a "positive distraction," i.e., one that helped take his mind off of the pressure of the competition.

But you sit down and really try to talk to the guys around you to distract you from thinking too much about the next event coming up, distract you from thinking about how poorly you did in the last event. Sometimes, like the 100 meters, you might have the best mark in your life, and you're still psyched up from that and you can't calm down. If you don't calm down, you're burned out by the time the long jump comes along. Definitely burned out by the time the 400 comes along. So you need people around you to distract you and make you think of something else, to calm yourself down. So, yeah, there's definitely a kind of fraternity thing. It's been a joy throughout the years to get to know the guys.

Echoing Glenn, Bill described how camaraderie helped him relax between events.

So I mean it's different in a way because of the relaxation part of it. Everyone's tense out there you can tell, their emotions, I mean if someone ties his shoe, unties it and ties it again and you're like, what in the hell did you do that for you know. You can tell, he's just nervous -- it didn't need to be retied or anything but I think it's good to help you to relax in that regard -- the pressure is not as great.

These decathletes also indicated that they liked to have the others there to "joke around" with between events. They felt this helped them to focus better when it came time to compete. Joking and laughing with each other to be more focused may sound like a contradiction in terms because when a person has this frame of mind it usually means they are not focusing on anything in particular. The present group of athletes, however, repeatedly noted that a jovial atmosphere helped them take their minds off the competition when they were between events, thus allowing them to relax. It would

be almost impossible to be intensely focused for the entire two days of the competition.

Bob, Bill and James describe clear examples of how "joking around" with the other guys between events helped them be refreshed when it came time to really think about their next event.

I was joking around and having fun. It helped me relax some. At the World Championships having fun with the team and having fun in Jamestown which goes hand in hand with doing well (Bob).

I was like, Oh shit, you blew it here. So I went back and joked around with the guys and tried to stay relaxed and I took my second jump and made it. Those guys really help me keep things in perspective sometimes (Bill).

So I joked around with everybody and when I saw that it was close to being time for me to go, I grabbed my headphones, put my headphones on and just kind of started getting fired up (Bill).

It's amazing in the decathlon you find it a lot I also like to joke around some between events because it helps relieve some of the pressure of competing. Besides I couldn't focus that long. I would go nuts (James).

As seen in the previous excerpts, camaraderie with the other competitors was also viewed as a positive factor during competition. They indicated that having an outlet during the competition helped make this a memorable performance.

In conclusion, the general thematic structure of this set of dialogues revealed some similarities among athletes. Their descriptions were not ones where everything went as planned nor were they competitions in which the athlete was able to accumulate his best score. The competitions

discussed as memorable were filled with significant distractions. These athletes were able to perform in what they experienced as a memorable fashion because they were aware of the distractions that occurred, and had specific strategies to overcome them and focus on what they needed to.

Experiences of Each of the Ten Events

Now that an overall thematic structure regarding the experience of elite decathletes during their most memorable performance has been given, I will provide a thematic structure for each of the ten events of the decathlon. During descriptions of this experiences, each decathlete talked specifically about each event. Each event provided unique distractions, which the athletes knew had to be specifically addressed and various strategies were used to accomplish this effectively. As with the previous themes, some descriptions were given in more detail than others.

While an event might have been figural at a particular time, all athletes were aware of the 1500 meters throughout the competition and their strategy for each event was often carried out with the 1500 meters in the background. Each event contained references to distractions that the athletes experienced. However, not all of the athletes were aware of the need to recognize or react to these distractions nor did they always have strategies to "get rid of the distractions" and focus on the "significant" aspects of the event. Several

examples from the dialogue on each event are provided in the next few pages.

100 Meters

The 100 meters is the first event of the competition. It is a sprinting event and each athlete is allowed three false starts. The 100 meters is generally contested with the wind at the competitors' backs. There are several distractions that occurred before and during this event for the athletes in this study. While the 1500 meters is in the background, it was not a significant factor this early in the competition.

Glenn had to deal with the pain in his foot from the beginning of the competition. Once the race began the pain was intense half way through. He began to have doubts about his ability to finish, but was aware that he needed to have a more positive outlook. He talked to himself and reassured himself that he could finish and that he had to be positive.

So 100 meters, first event, about 50 meters into the event, major pain in the old ankle. I'm thinking "okay, there's already a lot of pain, nine more events to go, I'm just not going to make it. I was wondering how I was ever going to be able to run the 1500.

I knew I had to stop thinking in such a negative way.

There was a lot of doubt and I was questioning God, but I just reminded myself that I had to rely on God and have faith that it was happening for a reason. Even though I didn't run real well, I began to focus on the next event.

Mike felt he wasn't as fast as some of the other athletes in this event. He knew this was a fact and he realized that he had to make up for his lack of speed by getting a good start. He focused on specific keys to narrow his attention before the start of the race. This helped him anticipate the firing of the gun and he got a good start.

The 100 I knew I was going to perform poorly somewhat. I'm not really saying I'm setting myself up for failure but I know I'm not one of the fastest decathletes so I think I false started. I usually false start one time every time in the 100. I always try to catch a good start and I never do but I try to get that little bit of an advantage.

Initially, the wind was a distraction for Bob, but he was able to recognize that he had no control over the wind and he went out and focused on his race.

They tried to run it with the wind but the wind never blows the right direction. The wind was not cooperating at all. I knew I couldn't control it and I reminded myself that everyone had to run against the wind. I didn't worry about it and concentrated on my race.

Being the first event of the day, the 100 meter dash was an event where the athletes wanted to have a good event and a strong start. It was over very quickly and the athletes began to prepare for three field events in a row. These are the long jump, shot put, and high jump.

The weather played a significant role in several of the athlete's experiences from the very beginning as is apparent from the excerpts in this section.

Long Jump

The long jump requires athletes to generate a great deal of speed as well as good timing and rhythm. They must accelerate as they run down the runway toward a board on which they must plant either foot and then leap forward into a sand pit. This event is run in the same direction as the wind is blowing like the 100 meters.

The first three excerpts from dialogues about the long jump are from James, Bob and Mike. All indicated how much they were aware of how the other competitors were doing compared to themselves. They didn't mention any strategies to deal with the distraction of worrying about the other competitors, although Mike did describe how this made him foul on his last jump.

James

Don and another guy had good jumps and they were ahead of me. But, they only jumped about 4 or 5 inches further than me and they are usually about a foot longer than I am.

Bob

I long jumped pretty well compared to everybody else so I was up there on them.

Mike

The guy that ran the best 100 had a great long jump and I'm like, gee I'm really getting behind him. So I think that does affect what you do a little bit. After he had a good one I was like, boy I need to do better and that's probably why I fouled my third jump because I pressed for a big jump so therefore being aware of the other competitors and what they were doing did indirectly affect me.

Bill indicated he wasn't concerned about the other competitors, but in his interview did talk about being aware of them and how they were doing:

I wasn't worried about those guys when it came time to do the long jump. Went to the long jump, no one jumped really well -- the board -- everyone said the board was flat or something and even in the open competition no one really jumped well. I didn't have a good first jump, but the other guys didn't have one either. I think on my second jump I was watching the other guys and no one else was jumping well. I just didn't have a great jump at all, but it didn't hurt me too much because no one else did well.

Joe had to jump into a tremendous headwind during this event. He was able to convince himself that if he thought about it, the wind would affect his ability to jump. He was able to handle this distraction as by focusing on certain keys instead of the wind.

I told myself as long as you're focused, you won't have negative thoughts, so it can't hurt you. The environment can only help you. If you're focused on your keys, focused on what it is you have to do in your events, the environment should, will only help you, not hurt you. But if you run down the runway and you've got a big, humongous headwind and you go "oh, my God, I've got a headwind," then you're not focused on your keys and it's hurting you. But that's 'cause you're not focused on your keys. I focused on my keys that helped me get good turnover and a strong jump off of the board.

The long jump seemed to be an event where the athletes were aware of the other competitors and how they were doing. These examples provide further proof of the intricate experiential infrastructure in a decathlon competition.

Shot Put

The shot put is contested on the infield area of the track. The object of this event is to almost "push" a 16 pound metal ball that is resting under the athlete's chin. It is a ballistic event and requires the competitors to generate a tremendous amount of power while staying in a specified circle. Each athlete is allowed three fouls before they are disqualified from this event. A foul occurs if the athlete steps out of the circle or walks out of the front part of the circle. An athlete would get no mark if the shot put did not land in a specified sector on the field.

Most athletes who put the shot either spin in the circle to generate power or shuffle backwards toward the front of the circle. Whichever technique the athlete chooses, he is attempting to be smooth and powerful as he releases the element.

Bob had difficulty getting his rhythm because the weather was constantly changing. He didn't handle this well and the 1500 meter run was on his mind.

I never got all the rhythm because the ring dried out for my third round of throwing and that was about it before it was really dry so I took that as partly conditions and stuff. I didn't handle the change in the weather conditions very well. Things were not going as well as I had hoped and it looked like I was going to have to run the 1500 hard.

The 1500 is not something you always think about, but you know it is coming.

Mike was aware of what he needed to do and used some keys to focus on, but was still distracted by the performance of other competitors. He was very specific about the keys that he used to help focus on himself.

I was confident going into the shot because I had a PR the meet before. I was worried about a couple of the other guys because they had been throwing well. I knew that I couldn't worry about that and tried to do what I usually do. The shot put -- the first throw just always try to relax, go through your turn and just push your shot. I'm always relaxed, arch slow out of the back because that's a common habit -- people get in there and they grind themselves into the ground. So I'm always thinking, just relax, let it happen and hammer it at the end. So that's all I think about, throw slow, boom, it's gone, follow through. Not a lot of thought there either I guess. I ended up throwing 46 feet 4 inches or something like that. A couple of the other guys threw better than I thought they would. So, I didn't gain as many points as I thought I would. I know I shouldn't think about what they are doing, but I do sometimes.

In the shot put you want to keep the upper body upright and the lower body down, so you get in the ring, you say "stay up, stay down, let's go," and you know what it means. Or "let's sweep the left, stay up, stay down" and if my throw accomplishes those things, then I'll throw well.

Bill had been having a problem with being too mechanical and thinking about too many aspects of his technique. During this particular meet he was able to simplify his focus to a few specific things.

But like in the shot put for example you put the left foot down and I had a habit of like coming out of the back of the ring, shooting this left leg instead of having it down and having a base to throw off of. I was keeping it bent and kind of rocking on it and I wasn't using any of my legs and just trying to arm it and trying to get rid of it. So, the cue was to think about getting my left leg down and that's really all I could

think about. Everything else had to pretty much come natural. You can't think, "okay I'm going to lower, then I'm going to extend both legs, I'm going to take the left arm, keep the shot put back, head up" -- it happens so quick. I had been doing that some before this meet, but I did that pretty well and ended up throwing good.

One distraction that was prevalent in the 100 meter dash and the long jump was also prevalent in the shot put; most athletes were aware of other competitors. Unlike the 100 meters and the long jump, the shot put seemed to be a very technical event and the athletes struggled with simplifying their focus to just a few keys.

High Jump

The high jump is another event where the athlete must generate a great deal of speed in his approach to the bar. In addition to generating good speed, the athlete must be able to leap in the air off one foot and clear a bar without knocking it over. Each athlete must be able to clear a height where the bar is set. An athlete does not have to jump at each height as he is allowed to pass on his turn until the bar is up to a height he would like to enter the competition. Once in the competition, each athlete is allowed three misses at a height before he is out. If the athlete does not clear the first height he attempts, he does not receive any points for that event.

The rain had an effect on Chris in the high jump because it made him a little more tentative than he wanted.

We got in the high jump and I had been high jumping real well, but was unsure just a little about floating on my last three steps 'cause it had been raining all day. That made me a little unsure of myself and it just killed me. I wanted to feel that open stride and take it up on the last three steps. I wanted it to be where I could feel what I was supposed to feel. So I think feeling for me is part of being an athlete, the naturalness.

Again in the high jump, James was aware of other competitors. He seemed to be thankful that he was aware of only a few competitors and not all of them, and he also felt these particular guys helped push him to do better.

Then came the high jump and there were a lot of good high jumpers in this meet, a lot of good ones. It was a good place to do well and Don and Sam had good jumps. Pedro jumped not as good as he was used to but he still jumped well. So, we kind of had a separation as five or six of us made a gap between us and the other ten guys competing that you usually don't see until the later on in the competition. That is always nice because you always want to know who is around you in the points and it helps to be able to focus on them because those people are gonna lift you to a higher level. I kind of knew there were four guys around me that I was going to be competing with at their level.

Glenn's foot was still bothering him and it was a big distraction during the high jump because he had to put an enormous amount of pressure on it when approaching the bar. He didn't have a strategy to deal with the pain and subsequently he didn't jump as well as he would have liked.

The next event, the high jump, the right foot plays a big role, it keeps you in the turn, which creates G forces that create height over the bar. I just couldn't get any speed on the runway and I jumped 6'6", didn't really get very high, lost a lot of points in that event.

Mike was somewhat confident going into the high jump because of his training. He did not really speak of distractions in this particular event, but he did describe in detail how he mentally prepared himself and focused before each jump. He used imagery to help him get into a rhythm he wanted and "let it happen."

In the high jump --I'm standing back there getting ready thinking, okay I'm just going to relax and I see myself running the curve under control, boom, off the ground. I like a lot of -- tempo is important to me.

I sat back there and saw myself. I'm getting ready to jump, I'm picturing myself coming around the curve, boom, arch up over the bar and then I tried to let it happen. Really that's one thing I always think, let it happen because I've done the preparation and I've done it 100 times and then I just have to let it happen and not try to make it happen. So I always think about, relax, arch over the bar because I get the herky jerky up there sometimes so I just think, get above the bar, get a good takeoff, lean away and relax above the bar and it usually works hopefully.

The high jump was the last field event of the first day. Up to this point the athletes had not been required to compete for longer than about 11 seconds at a time. Therefore, fatigue was not yet experienced as a factor.

400 Meters

The 400 meters is the last event of the first day. It is an event in which the athletes have to run one complete lap around the track. It is a difficult race because it is a sprint as well as an endurance race. It is the first event of the day in which the athletes are maximally tested

aerobically. It is an event that some of the participants in this study dread. It is a taste of what is to come at the end of the second day in the 1500-meter run. Proper training is very important for this event. If an athlete does not feel he has trained well for this event, it is difficult for him to feel confident in his ability to run well.

There are several excerpts from the interview with Mike about the 400-meter run. He didn't feel confident in his training and was concerned about how far he was going to be able to go in the race before the pain set in. He indicated that for him, the 400 is an event that he likes to find someone to run against because it helps push him to run harder. He had several different things he was focusing on before and during the race.

Well I didn't have the proper training to be ready to run a good quarter -- not because -- I've been a year out of college now -- I wasn't in the college system. I was coaching -- I had a lot of other things so I didn't train and I was at the point I didn't know where my future was going in that event coming into the '89 season so I didn't do all the necessary preparation background training and up to the preparation for that actual meet.

The quarter is a real interesting event because you know what kind of training you've been doing and if you haven't trained hard you'll go out kind of under control. It's going to hurt regardless but you'll go out saying, "well I don't want to die, I don't want to fall apart that last 100 meters" and when you're training good for it you know you can run hard all the way so there's a lot of psychology going into the 400 and it's all based on what preparation you've done.

There's a couple of guys out there that are 48 flat or better quarter milers so I started churning in the sand

more or less with less than 100 meters to go and I didn't catch them but I did run one of my better times and so I knew I didn't hurt myself in that event.

I keep harping on the fact that I can't control what anybody else does or they don't have any effect on what I do but the quarter is one of those odd events that really does. Because you -- because I knew what -- Bob Odgers was outside of me. He had run 48.2 earlier in the year and so was James Wilcox who I know had run in the 47s so if I'm coming into that last turn near them I know I'm running good. On that day I was in the position where coming off the home stretch I was right with them and I go, all right, I'm going to run a good one and so therefore I knew I had a decent time going because of where I was at in the race and I guess if I had been way behind them I would have tried to pick up knowing I wasn't running well. So therefore I was gauging off of them. That last 100 meters you have no control on what you're doing so it's whether your legs can go or not and in that case they went but, they didn't go as good as they could have but I did run the time I was happy with so I wasn't disappointed in that event at all. But yeah I was gauging myself off of what other people were doing.

Always before the 400 -- you always have got to go to the bathroom because you're nervous and you know it's going to hurt and you're excited and you need to get ready. You're pumped up, you do your warm up and I always get in the blocks and think about, react, run that curve, run that backstretch, get yourself in position, never set yourself up for failure. So I'm always thinking, make ground up in the curve, run that backstretch, and hammer that curve, run that second curve as hard as you can and then hopefully you can finish. You're always thinking, where is it going to be that I fall apart. I'm hoping today that I can get to 350. You always try to push it as far as you can and it goes through your mind, just get yourself out, run tall, run strong, just keep your turnover up and I remember when you hit that wall think, "turnover, turnover, pick it up, pick it up."

Just keep your rhythm going and that's all I think about and I know I'm just digging as hard as I can but I'm just thinking, "keep it going."

Chris was very nervous before his 400-meter race, but he challenged himself to take a chance. He provided a vivid

description of what it was like for him to feel strong in the last 50 meters of the race. He felt strong because he had been training well and he had a solid fitness base. This is the only time any of the athletes mentioned anything like being in "the zone".

In the quarter I was probably the most nervous I'd ever been in my life. We warmed up and were in the waiting room with the good 400 meter runners. Ben Jones and those guys, and I was really nervous, but I told myself I had to take a chance and get out and run hard at the beginning. And that's what I did, and I really had good fitness, and breezed through a 46.5, my best time ever. I got done and wasn't even breathing hard or anything. I had gotten into that zone where it was easy for me and the concentration was focused. I felt really even kind of stylish running the last 100 meters because I felt so good. And usually in the quarter you're struggling, but I felt good. As I went past the athletes' section, I felt like I got a boost and was able to open it right up. It was the first time that had ever happened in that kind of a race. It's like .. stylish is kind of a bad word, but it's a strong feeling. I'm 50' out in front of everybody else, all alone, running for the tape, you feel strong, uplifted, very inspired at the time.

In furthering the importance of having confidence in one's training for the 400 meters, Bill described how he did well because of his training.

I was nervous before the 400, but I reminded myself that I had been training well and I could do it here. That quarter was probably my fastest or my second fastest quarter in the decathlon and I had trained really hard in the 400 so again I had a lot of confidence and I said to myself, well you trained hard, you busted your butt in practice. Then when you get to a meet it's no problem because whenever you do a 400 meter workout you're doing a lot more than you do when you get to the meet so if you can run a good 400, a good 300, a good 200 -- I mean it's a piece of cake when you go to the meet.

As is apparent in the above excerpts, it was very important for these athletes to feel confident in their training for the 400 meters. They indicated that they were nervous, but by simply reminding themselves of how well they had trained, they were able to feel confident while they competed. The 400 meters is not the type of event that a decathlete feels he can do well in if he has not trained properly, and these decathletes describe this experience clearly.

110-Meter Hurdles

Being the first event of the second day, the athletes reported wanting to get off to a good start by having a solid race. The 110 meter hurdles is a sprint race which athletes in this study can run in about 14 seconds. There are ten hurdles spread out evenly over the 110 meters of the race. Again, each athlete is allowed two false starts before being disqualified on the third. On the second day, the 1500-meter run began to become more figural for these athletes as they reported experiencing fatigue from the first day.

As with the previous events that caused an inordinate amount of pressure on the feet, Glenn had intense pain in the hurdle race. The fracture in his foot actually splintered in a different direction during this race. The pain was reported to be distracting and he again was doubting his

ability to finish the competition and be competitive in the 1500 meters.

Hurdles is the worst event to do on a broken foot. It's the lead leg, my right foot that was broken. Each time I landed on that thing, it hurt a lot. And after about 4 or 5 hurdles, I felt something pop in there. Thinking about the pain during those last few hurdles caused me to lose my focus somewhat. Finished the race, had a lot more pain to deal with. I didn't think I was going to make it, much less be able to run a solid 1500 meters. But, again I reminded myself that the pain I was going through was nothing compared to what Christ went through on the cross. That helped keep me going.

Glenn was aware of the need to change his negative thinking about his ability to finish the competition. He used his belief in Christ to help support and focus him through the event.

Bob felt he ran a pretty good race, but not as good as he thought he should have. He ran the race without hitting a hurdle until the eighth one. He became aware of one of the other competitors at this time and seemed to lose his concentration on his race.

So I came out and ran well but not great in the hurdles. I had a great race going through eight hurdles. Edward Hinkey and I were side by side at eight hurdles and he ran 13.57 at World Championships. He ended up running 14.01 I think and I ran 14.21 because I kind of wobbled off the eighth hurdle. I was really not aware of him until the eighth hurdle.

In contrast to Bob, Joe discussed specific keys he had for the hurdles. Joe reported that he was able to narrow his focus to a few specific things and felt he ran a good hurdle race.

In the hurdles one of my keys is my trail leg. Attack, attack and hurdle and drive the trail leg all the way through, that's all I think about. It might be a word or a sound in my head, but that's what it means. That's the meaning attached to it, attack and then trail all the way through. I don't say that, but that's what I'm thinking. And that's what happened. I attacked the hurdle, stayed low, didn't hit any of 'em, and my trail leg went all the way through. Which is exactly what I need to do to run the hurdles fast. So I hit my keys. The hurdles is an event where the competitors are running close to each other. Such proximity was reported to cause a few of the athletes to lose their concentration and become aware of the others around him as the race proceeds to the finish. Two of the competitors who described their experience during this race had specific strategies to deal with such distractions that either occurred or had the possibility of occurring.

Discus

Like the long jump, the discus is the first of three field events in a row. Although these are all field events, they are different in the strategies involved.

The discus is accomplished or conducted in much the same manner as the shot put. Each athlete must stay within a determined circle when throwing the discus and he is allowed three throws. He receives a foul or no mark if he steps out of the circle during the throw or if the discus does not land within a marked sector. The discus itself is a saucer shaped implement made of wood and metal. The athletes hold it in one hand, gain momentum as they spin in the circle, and attempt to send it through the air. Throwing the discus requires less power than the shot put, but requires the

athlete to be fluid in his motions. It can be a technical event as well.

James was worried about his ability to throw the discus because he had not been training very well, but he reminded himself that he had been a good discus thrower up until the last few months. James and Mike also described how they tried to relax in the discus and not throw very hard. They wanted to be relaxed because it would help them to be fluid in their motion.

The discus, I had been training horribly and that was the one event that I was worried about and I guess my coaches were worried about. Later, they told me that was the one that was really scaring them (James).

But, I had always considered myself a good discus thrower with the exception of these last few months. And, I remember getting in there and saying that everything feels good and everything should go well. Um, and I went in there and threw an easy one first. I wanted to get in a safe throw and this one was a little too easy, a little too safe. It wasn't a good enough mark that I could change anything and go for a big throw. So, I remember getting in there for the second throw and wanting to throw a medium throw. I wanted to relax and I wasn't thinking hard and I wasn't thinking easy like last time either. It went pretty well, the second throw, it wasn't anything great and it wasn't real bad either. Then the third throw came and I started to think that we better get a good throw off here and I tried to throw it and it caught wind bad and went into the ground and I fouled that one on purpose. So, uh, I am glad I took the second throw conservatively but not over conservative. Because the discus had been going pretty bad for me, but I got a good throw off. Something that wasn't going to move me up but it wasn't going to move me down either (James).

I think I threw a couple of wobblers out there that never went anywhere and the guy that was really leading the meet had a pretty poor discus and he threw poorly

and I go, okay I'm gaining on him but the other guy that I was really worried about had a good discus so I'm like, oh god I'm not making up any ground (Mike).

In order to be successful in the discus you do need to have a relaxed, even tempo with a slight acceleration with a lot of leverage having your arms extended. Once -- usually people will throw a decent throw on their first throw because they are relaxed and they just more or less go through the motions and do the things they're capable of doing and they get a respectable throw in and then -- okay it's like, okay now I'm really going to hammer it and get a big throw out. So you get in there and you really speed things up and you get out of control and you don't do what you're capable of. Once you get tense and get it pumped your arms go from being seven foot wing span into five and you don't have the leverage to work for so they talk about a relaxed state of excitement which is doing things aggressively but under control and I wasn't doing that. Maybe because I wasn't that experienced of a decathlete or whatever. At that point I wasn't able to perform at my best level with the amount of arousal or whatever (Mike).

Joe could have become over aroused when competing against another competitor who was his friend as well as a good discus thrower. He knew that if he competed within himself, rather than with the others, he would feel less pressure and perform in a more relaxed state.

And he had the discus record in the Olympics for the decathlon. So I knew if I had a good discus, it was going to be between him and I. I threw a good discus but he threw further. Anyway, we're going back and forth and he comes to me and says "you're not going to beat me on your last throw, are you?" and I said "I'm going to try." I knew that I had to focus on myself and not let him break my concentration. I had my keys once I stepped in the ring and used them very well. I was relaxed and focused on those few things. So I won the discus with a pretty big throw and boom I moved up, maybe to 12th or 13th place now.

Bob also talked about the importance of staying relaxed and having just a few things to focus his attention on while throwing the discus.

The discus the main thing I concentrate on now is just how I finish the throw because I had a lot of problems in the past of being clear off the circle when I throw the discus so now I think about making sure both feet are planted solid on the ground and not reversing. That's the main thing I think about now and then if I've got that going good I don't worry about it much and I'll think about something else maybe my arm or something. But the main thing I want to do is have a narrow focus and relax.

Preceding excerpts provide good examples of how athletes in this study reported viewing the discus during their most memorable performance. They indicated that it was an event that did not go well when they tried too hard or were distracted by other competitors. They noted that the key for them doing well in this event was to focus on a few specific things, which allowed them to be relaxed and "fluid".

Pole Vault

The pole vault is probably the most technical of all of the events the athletes must compete in during the decathlon. Like the long jump and the high jump it is an event that requires the athlete to generate speed in the approach.

The goal of the athlete in the pole vault is to carry a fiber glass pole down a runway while running at a fast pace. Once the athlete arrives at the vaulting area, he must plant

the end of the pole in a metal box in the ground and use the pole as leverage to vault himself up in the air and over a bar. The bar is suspended over a large foam mat on which the athlete attempts to land. As in the high jump the athlete can enter the competition at any height at or above a minimum standard. He must clear at least one height in order to receive any points in the event. Three misses at a particular height result in the athlete being out of the competition.

At this point in the competition the athletes reported becoming more aware of how they were doing relative to other athletes and were figuring out what they had to do in the 1500 to do well in the competition.

Glenn was still in the competition and doing pretty well despite the pain in his foot. The pole vault put a great amount of pressure on his foot and the pain was a serious distraction again.

The pole vault, an event that definitely requires that you generate some speed on the runway or you'll end up hurting yourself even worse. I was scared to death going into the pole vault, with all that had happened already, nothing but negativity other than the shot-put. Nothing but negative throughout the first seven events, by then. I thought this was going to be the one that was going to completely knock me out now. I was scared to death about this event not to mention having to run the 1500.

Bob was aware that the rain could affect his vault, so he stayed out in the rain to get a feel for what to expect.

It rained during the pole vault but I stayed out in the rain and took a lot of jumps warming up to get used to it.

Like some of his other events he reported being very aware of other competitors in the vault. This was when he reported really beginning to sort out the score and to project what he would have to do in the 1500.

I'm jumping 16 feet 5 inches which is my season best and Edgar no heighthed earlier and I hung with the guys from France which had beat me by quite a bit at the World Championships. I jumped 16 and they jumped like one of them jumped 16.5, 16.8 and he made a bunch of bars hitting it and bouncing it around. The other guy jumped 17.8 at World and 16.8 at Talon. At that point though I knew I was only behind Fazio by a few points after the vault and none of those guys left in the meet were anywhere close or could throw the jav as far as I could and none of them would beat me by enough in the 1500 to matter. It was a good feeling to know that I had a little cushion in the 1500.

Mike reported also being very aware of two of the other performers during the vault. There was one particular athlete who Mike was worried about. Each time this athlete would clear a height, Mike thought about having to run the 1500 faster.

The guy that was leading me vaulted like 11 feet and I knew he was terrible and he jumped terrible. So I'm saying, oh I can beat him by five feet and make up a lot of ground. The guy that I was worried about, that I thought was going to end up being the eventual winner, was vaulting well. He made two or three heights on his third jump and every time he'd make another height I'm like, oh my god, I'm going to have to run that 1500 faster or I'm going to have to really do this and that which is not right because I can only control what I'm doing but I ended up jumping 16'8 or 16'10 that day which was real good for me and I was real excited because I was jumping well. And I remember each time I got over another bar I was thinking, okay I'm getting

myself closer, I'm getting back into this. I think coming out of that event I was still in third place and I was -- I want to say I was 200 out of first and maybe 100 out of second.

To James it was all right to be aware of the points he had scored. He did not always know exactly how many, but he liked to be aware of the score. He also indicated that it became more important later in the competition.

I have always been aware of the points, but not really concerned with exactly how many. I know when they raise the bar to a certain height it is worth a certain number of points. You get about 27 points for each height and about the same in the pole vault. In the shot you get about 15 to 18 points for each foot depending on where you start. But, I think it is good. It is just part of the mental aspect of the decathlon, knowing your place or where you are and how you are doing point wise and how you are feeling and what you should do next. It really comes into play around the vault or jav.

Mike also talked about how he tried to focus on a few key things in the vault and relax instead of trying to overdo it. He also discussed how he tried to be objective in his analysis of a vault after it happened and learn from it.

On that day I was really going to kill it and that's not how to do it and when I'm going into the vault I always think about, "I've always got my vault cues, run tall on the runway, run relaxed, get my plant up, stay down on the pole, don't initiate my swing so quick," which is a common problem with me. But I knew I was vaulting well so my confidence level was up and every vault that came in I thought, "okay, I'm coming down the runway, relax, accelerate into the box, get my plant up high, staying long, getting my knee, driving my swing, throwing away the pole." Seeing it happen 100 times -- been in it 100 times -- no problem but I remember after each vault I always make an attempt to look back and say, "what did I do that time, why was it a good vault or why was it a bad vault."

The pole vault is an event that can make or break a decathlete. It was a difficult event for these athletes and they reported being tired by the time they got to it. Although the 1500 had always been in the background, during the pole vault the athletes began to see where everyone was in the point standing and how many points everyone had.

Javelin

The javelin is the second to last event and the last field event of the competition. The objective in the javelin is to throw a metal spear as far as possible. The spear is weighted more on one end and comes to a point on both ends. Once the javelin is thrown, its point must be the first part to touch the ground. If the javelin lands flat on the ground, out of the sector, or the athlete steps over a designated foul line, a foul is called. Each athlete is allowed three attempts, and the athlete must get a mark on one of these throws to get any points. It is a technical event and requires the athlete to generate power by running down a runway toward the foul line and throwing the javelin up in the air with a high trajectory.

The 1500 meter run became even more figural during this event. Knowing where the others were point-wise continued to be a factor here. All of the athletes were really beginning to figure out where they were in relation to everyone else so

they would know what they had to run in the 1500 to beat people close to them in the standings.

Like several of the other field events the athletes reported wanting to have a few specific things to think about when throwing the javelin. Mike had always been very mechanical and had many things to think about in this event. In this competition, he learned from someone who was much more simplistic.

I remember Bob Odgers had a real short approach in the javelin and he started with the javelin back and he just did about three crossovers and he just threw the shit out of it and I'm going, wow how did he do that? And I'd always had this long methodical approach and never thrown that far and during that time I said, I think it's happening while I've got the javelin back, I'm not able to relax and have it back in the right place. So as I'm warming up, I'm doing just a couple of warm-ups then I'm dropping it back and throwing. I'm warming up and thinking, "boy this is working pretty good" and so I say, "I'm going to try it in the competition", and I ended up throwing pretty good with it.

Going into the javelin you always think about, "keep your points lined up, make sure I'm throwing the tail of this thing through the tip of that thing." You're always throwing through your point and the javelin was one of the events I didn't think about, relax and let it happen because I didn't think that mattered and I really still don't because my technique is not that good. I always just got on the runway, accelerating and throwing the shit out of it through that point as hard as I could and as technically good as I could and I always want to relax early because if you relax you get yourself into better body position as far as having your shoulder back, arm back or whatever and once you get tense things ball up. So you always think, "relax, relax, relax" right until you're ready to throw it and then you're bunched up and wham, it's gone and that's all I thought about was just "run and relax, then hammer it" and it seemed to work for me.

James, Joe, and Mike described being very aware of the other competitors and of figuring out where they were in relation to them:

I remember getting there and there were some really good throwers in there.

I was down 88 points to the guy in first place.

But, the guy who was in first had a very good throw which was his life-time best. Again I was thinking about having to run the 1500 each time he threw (James).

Its kind of funny because when you get to the javelin, you're like "okay, this guy's going to throw about this, if I throw this, and if he runs this ..." a lot of figuring goes on. That's when everyone starts to think and things are a little shaky and you're down a little more than you think you should be. But if you're doing okay, you don't worry about it 'til after javelin. You throw your jav and then you run (Joe).

One of my better throws and I didn't beat Bob who was in second but the other guy who was a bad vaulter also had a terrible jav so I have now moved ahead of him in the competition and I think Bob's still got a 100-point cushion on me going into the 1500 (Mike).

Chris reported that he experienced a distraction at this time because of the lull in the action and the fatigue he was feeling after eight events. To combat the two distractions he reported doing some specific things to maintain focus and raise his energy level enough to do well.

But once again there was a lull in the action in the javelin. Everybody's emotions dropped down, and here we are at the javelin. I had to really get my intensity back, especially for the last two events. That's the hardest thing at the decathlon is keeping that intensity level up, being able to perform over the 18-hour period.

I'd do some physical energizing techniques as well as relaxation techniques. That was how I managed to get my energy level back up.

The javelin was an event that the athletes did not talk a great deal about in their experience other than they tried to simplify it and it was an event where the probable order of finish became much clearer. This may be due to the fact that it is right before the toughest event of the competition.

The point standings during the javelin throw were much more figural than in any of the other events. It was a time when athletes knew what they would have to run in the 1500 to do well. As Joe pointed out earlier, the extent to which the standings were figural was largely dependent on how each of them was doing in the competition. If they were doing well up to that point most calculations began after the javelin was over and before the start of the 1500.

1500 Meters

All nine previous events were contested leading up to the big finish. The 1500-meter run was described as the toughest event by each of these athletes. Some indicated that they feared it, others said they dreaded having to run it, and some said it was a memorable experience because they did not know how well they had done in the competition until after they ran this race.

The event itself is a strategic one as well as being physically demanding. As noted in the main thematic structure of this study, the 1500 meters was described by these decathletes as containing all of the distractions, the awareness of a need to react to or recognize these distractions, and strategies for focusing their attention. In short, it serves as an overall summary of the complete competition.

The 1500-meters is the last event and it is where everything becomes clear. By the time the race started each athlete knew exactly how many points he had and what time he had to run to move up in the standings. The coaches were reported to have become quite important to these athletes at this point. During this period, the coaches were experienced as helping the athletes ascertain where they were in relation to everyone else and to give them advice on how to run the race. In some situations it is an interesting race because an athlete can lose to someone by several seconds and still beat him in the overall competition.

Some specific examples of the distractions the athletes discussed included fatigue, fear and pain. James addressed the issue of fatigue by describing how he felt going into the race.

It's hard to run a good 1500 at an international meet because the first day you compete 12 hours, the second day is over 12 hours, we'd start at 9:00 in the morning and it is probably 10 or 10:30 at night, so you're just

mentally and physically exhausted. The 1500, I knew was going to ruin me.

Chris indicated that fear was a distraction he had to deal with when it came time to run the race. He was battling with making a commitment to run the race from the very beginning.

Some people make the commitment to run the 1500 from the first step. I still am battling with feeling my way through it. It's like "can I handle the pain? do this and that? 2 laps to go, now I can deal with this pain and discomfort. It's something I'm trying to get over, but I've done it with every other event and every decathlon.

Having made it through the previous nine events, Glenn was doubting whether he would be able to make it through the race. He made a decision to run and experienced a great deal of pain.

So I decided I'd go out and if it hurts too much, I'd just stop. I've done a lot and I won't run if it's going to be a life-threatening, crippling kind of thing out there. I'll just stop. Started the race, major pain, almost fell down because I tripped on something. The first 800 meters a lot of pain.

Again, at this point in the competition each athlete was very aware of the other competitors and how he compared with them in the standings. There was a great deal of strategy involved.

Joe knew exactly what place he was in at the start of the race and he set his sights on trying to beat two of the people who were ahead of him in the standings. He indicated that it was important for him to pay attention to what place

he was in because that was what ultimately determined the outcome. However, he said it didn't really become important for him until after the javelin.

So we went to the 1500 and the situation was I was in 8th place. I had (name) ahead of me (name) ahead of me and (name) ahead of me. I thought I could catch two people. I thought I could catch Monday and maybe Gaines. Being in 8th, I thought maybe I could get 6th.

So as it turned out, I ran fast enough to beat four of the guys, so I was like "oh, my gosh, this is great." But the guy behind me ran fast enough to beat all of us, so he got fourth place. As it turned out Don got 3rd, 113 points ahead of me, with that extra shot-put. 4th place was 4 points ahead of me. So had I known, I might have been a little faster, maybe, just maybe. But I didn't even think he had a chance. But he ran a gutsy race, so he was 4 points ahead. The guy behind me was 1 point behind me, the guy behind him was like 1 or 2 points behind him. It was like incredible!

You keep an eye on the place you are in 'cause ultimately that's the most important thing. And it doesn't really matter until after the javelin, 'cause that's when you know what you have to run.

Once the race began, Joe narrowed his focus to one runner and "attached" himself to him. This helped him keep his mind off of the pain he was experiencing.

I tried to find someone who, or someone who was running a comfortable pace I felt I should be running. Then I found somebody and tried to attach myself to them and focus on them. If he sped up, if I felt like I could do it, I'd speed up. If they slowed down, I'd pass 'em. I feed off people. A lot of times you can lose your thought of pain and "I need air" by focusing on somebody else, or some thing. I focus on shoulders. If I have a chance to do that with somebody, I will. If I don't then I gotta go. That day there were plenty of people to focus on.

Glenn's coaches were significant to him at this point in the competition. They helped him develop a strategy based on

how well he could run the race and what he and his coaches thought other people could run.

My coaches let me know. They said "this is the guy to watch, if you want to win the silver, you've got to beat this guy by that many seconds." Which if I were healthy I would have done. And this guy was far enough ahead that he'd beat you, win the bronze over you. So I just made sure that guy never got in front of me. And when I finished, he wasn't in front of me. And he would have had to beat me by quite a bit, anyway. I knew that, most likely if I finished, I'd win a medal, unless I completely had to walk to finish.

Mike described a similar situation where everything became clear and he knew what he had to do in the race in order to win the competition. Knowing his place in the competition was a very important thing for him at this time.

Going into the 1500 I had to beat this one individual by 15 to 16 seconds or whatever and he had a 1500 PR close to mine and neither one of us ran very good that day but I was able to beat him enough to win the meet.

Now we're sitting there all of this and we're listening to the scores before the 1500 and I'm learning that I'm now in second. I'm still about 100 points out and I know the guy ahead of me, Bob Odgers had run like 4:18 was his best and mine was 4:09 and now I've got to beat him by 12 to 14 seconds in this race.

The next few excerpts are examples of three athletes' experience during their actual race. These excerpts were provided by Mike, James and Bill. For Mike it was important for him to keep a good tempo throughout the race. And, he reminded himself of the things he needed to do to keep that tempo.

I just kept thinking, keep picking them up and putting them down, just keep your turnover, don't stride out, just keep it up and down and as much as you try and as much as it hurts it never goes as good as you want it to.

The 1500 you're always on the line saying, okay, I want to run a smart race, a smart tempo, here's what I want to run, I plan this thing out, here's what I'm going to run, here's what my time is, I know what I want to come through the quarter in, then I can make an adjustment. I always try to run relaxed that first 200 meters. Too many guys go out hard and they're running that first 200 in 33 or 32 or whatever and I'm usually behind them at that point. I usually don't take the lead until about the 500 meter mark just because everybody goes out and dies and I run more even paced so I know what I'm going to do and I remember just thinking during that race, just keep my tempo up, keep my stride, keep consistency, and just relax. Too many people are out there huffing and puffing and you just have to run. Think it's a road run and think about prolonging the pain as long as you can because if you can get to the last lap, you're going to be all right, just get yourself there in a good time and just keep your rhythm going. I remember I'm running, I'm running and just I'm hurting, hurting and I just keep plugging away. That was my strategy that day.

For James, the 1500-meter race was the highlight of the competition because he didn't have much confidence in himself going into the race and he felt he ran a good race. He had always wanted a competition to come down to the 1500 meters and for him to have a good race in that situation. He provided a very detailed account of his experience during that particular race.

So, that is what it came down to, I had to run the 1500 well. I always wanted to have to run hard and make it hurt and have a great time it would be worth more. I figured the more pain that I went through and the more I could put into it the more it would be worth.

While I ran the first lap on the pace I wanted to, he was right on my shoulder. Which I thought was nice,

because I knew if I went too fast I would lose contact with him in the beginning. I knew this guy was going to try to hang right with me and I knew that if he did, that he would never finish the race. Uh, so the second lap I came through 800 meters and he was 10 meters behind me. I just remember he sounded like he was going to die and that was good because we were only half way through the race, especially because he was a terrible runner and we were at altitude. So, I thought I would put some distance between the two of us and I thought if he lost contact with me he would lose it big. Once I made my move at the half mark, once he sees me go away, I wanted him to be tired so he wouldn't even think about going with me. I told my coaches that no matter where he was in the race to tell me that he was right behind me. So, I was going around the track and I couldn't hear him breathing and I knew he was at least 20 meters behind me and I had to beat him by at least 14 seconds. So, with 300 meters to go I heard someone tell me I had him by 30 meters. And I just said "I've got him" but I wanted to make sure just in case he had saved something for the end. I didn't think he had, but I wanted to make sure and I also wanted to run a good time. Before, I really thought about I was in 4th place in the 1500 and I have never finished high in the 1500. The one guy from our school was going to win the race no matter what, he had a fantastic 1500. So, I just went for the guy in third and passed him, I was just running all out. I couldn't even see straight and the altitude was affecting me. As I came around the last turn everyone was cheering and the guy in second was right in front of me. So, the guy in first was finishing as we were coming around the last turn. The guy in second was 10 meters in front of me and I kind of looked over my shoulder and I saw the guy I had to beat by 14 seconds was 100 meters back and he was already 30 seconds behind.

Bill experienced some anxiety before the race because he was not sure of how well one of the other competitors could run the 1500. He had never competed with him before and this person was very close to him in the standings. His coaches did not provide him with the information he wanted to hear, so he had to run the race not knowing how the other person

could run. Bill described his experience during this time as well as his experience once the race began in detail.

So I'm looking around for my coach and saying, 'coach find out what this guy's PR is in the 1500" and I had -- actually I had three different coaches there because we had coaches for different events and one guy was like a media guy but he also helped coach so I'm like, 'hey Don what's this guy's PR you should know' and he's like, "I don't know I'll look for it and I'll get back to you." Went to the other coach and said, "what's the deal here?" and it's funny because the stands were real high -- kind of like if you look out there the stands were way up there -- I mean you couldn't even reach and touch the top so I'm looking up saying, "hey coach what's the problem here?" and he didn't know. Went to the other one and said, "hey, what's going on?" and they're all like, "we can't help you man" and then one of my -- throws coach came up and said, "hey you just have to run, you have to run what it takes to win, that's the bottom line."

Just wondering, looking at this guy, "hey man what are you going to do?" You feel helpless because you can't do anything and then you just have to make the decision, "hey are you going to run through the pain of it or in the comfort zone and do what you can do." It's funny because I went out in the first lap -- he was behind me so I was like, "okay I'm sitting cool," the second lap started going pretty good and then there was a guy who had a uniform similar to Randy's and he started coming up on me and I was like, "I've got to start going or he's going to blow by me." So I started rolling and this was like 300 meters to go. The finish was here and the track was like here and we were right here so I started just keeping the pace with him and then like with 200 meters left he kind of started to pull up a little bit and I just started to kind of go for it and then I really looked over and saw that it wasn't him. I was like, "forget it" and I only had like 150 meters left so I just brought it in and I think Franz came with me. Franz challenged and we just went into the tape there but even when I got in I knew that I had won.

The 1500-meter run was a significant event for several reasons. It marked the end of the competition. It was a very grueling event and all of the questions about place and

the other competitors became clear. All of the athletes reported experiencing distractions just before as well as during the event, and all reported being able to handle these in one way or another. The 1500 meters was the event the athletes dreaded the most and was on their minds to varying degrees from the very beginning.

Summary

In conclusion, it was my intent in this chapter to provide a thematic structure of the experiences of a group of elite decathletes during their most memorable or meaningful performance in a decathlon. A brief synopsis of the reasons why each athlete chose a particular competition as his most memorable was provided. An overall structure was also given to show the four major themes that came from the dialogue with these athletes. These themes included The 1500, Distractions, The Awareness of a Need to Recognize or React to Distractions, and Focusing. I then provided several examples from the dialogue for each of the ten events of the decathlon that demonstrated aspects of the overall thematic structure.

While examples from all of the dialogues were not provided, the few that were selected are meant to give the reader a good idea of what these athletes reported experiencing during the competition.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to provide a thorough description of the experience of elite decathletes during their "most memorable or meaningful" performance in a decathlon competition. In the previous chapter, a thematic structure of the experience of these athletes was provided as it emerged in the course of the dialogues constituting each of the interviews. The present chapter begins with a discussion of methodological issues involved in the present investigation. Following this, the themes and sub themes forming the general structure of the experience of the participants will be discussed in relation to the existing literature on elite performers. A discussion of the experience of the participants while competing in the ten events of the decathlon is provided followed by a conclusion. Finally, implications of the present study for coaches and sport psychology consultants as well as for future research are provided.

Methodological Issues

Participants in this study were chosen because of their unique competitive situation; that is, because they were

experienced decathletes and highly ranked nationally and internationally. In addition all proved to be very articulate and able to describe their experience in the decathlon with ease. This was most likely due to the fact that all enjoyed competing in the decathlon and had memorable or meaningful competitions that they were willing and able to talk about.

I argued in an earlier chapter (Chapter I) that even though the number of studies in sport psychology utilizing qualitative methods is slowly increasing, the majority of published studies have used objective or quantitative methods. I also implied that, when used exclusively, such objective methods may be too restrictive in the study of human phenomena since only the observable aspects of a person's activities from a third-person perspective can be effectively measured and the research logic of this paradigm is to predict results and propose hypotheses based on assumptions of specific theories.

In contrast to third-person methods of research , it is imperative that first person experiences of athletes also be viewed as a viable topic to be included in the field of sport psychology. To further our understanding of these experiences, researchers must be willing to utilize methodologies that allow athletes to best describe these experiences. Traditional questionnaires or other standardized approaches do not allow participants much leeway

in describing their experiences since participants are required to answer only the questions that are pre-determined by the researcher.

Based on this argument, the purpose of the current investigation was not to predict what might happen or to restrict participants to a set of a-priori questions; rather, its purpose was to describe the experience of a specified set of participants who volunteered to talk about a competition they chose as memorable or meaningful. By using a phenomenological interview I hoped participants would have maximum latitude in describing their experiences without being led by questions that were pre-determined or might not arise during the course of the dialogue. I provided an initial question to indicate the specific experience I was interested in having the participants describe.

Once the interview began, I made every effort to listen attentively to the participant at all times and to follow his leads in whatever direction(s) he wanted to proceed. I tried to take a non-directive stance and to refrain from introducing preconceived questions into the interview. I sought clarification when specific statements were not clear, and I generally tried to assist each participant in articulating his experience fully. Each question asked was intended to help the participant to describe his experience in experience-near terms. If the participant was directed to be reflective in his answers, he might have had more of a

tendency to talk in abstract terms, making it more difficult to attempt to describe his experience at the level it was lived by him during the competition.

After all interviews had been conducted and transcribed, an analysis of the data followed. In qualitative research an important aspect of the process is that the investigator bracket her/his assumptions to the best of her/his ability. In addition to the bracketing interview I participated in before conducting interviews with the participants, I also took part in an interpretive (or research) group to assist in arriving at a description of the participants' experience. In the process of interpreting the dialogue from the interviews in this study, each member of the group had a copy of the transcript. One member of the group read the questions from the dialogue and I (as the researcher) read the participant's part of the dialogue. The group discussed the dialogue after short excerpts had been read in an attempt to describe the experience of each athlete in his own words. Utilizing the format of the hermeneutical circle (Bleicher, 1980; and Thompson et al., 1989), as opposed to a more linear analysis in quantitative research, the group continually attempted to relate certain passages of the dialogues to the whole and then to relate each interview to other interviews so as to determine similar patterns. This process was repeated for all but two of the transcripts, which I

interpreted alone, and returned to the group with the nomothetic results of these transcripts.

According to Thompson et al. (1989), even though it is ideal to have researchers who are experts in phenomenological research or who are familiar with the phenomenon being studied, these characteristics are not required for the group to be effective in the analysis process. Since group members are not required to be experts in phenomenological research, an interpretive group can be a helpful tool for researchers in sport psychology who are interested in doing qualitative research. Interpreting qualitative research is a very time-consuming endeavor; however, if members of the group are willing to put in the time to effectively arrive at a description that captures the participant's experience, it can be a positive experience for researcher and members of the group. As discussed in Chapter III, the members of the group question the researcher's interpretation of the dialogue by having him/her provide evidence of this interpretation in the data and assist in the bracketing of researcher assumptions.

After arriving at a description of what I thought was the experience of each athlete, it was important to ask the athlete if he felt the description captured his experience. There is no better way to find out if the researcher has got the essence of the experience than to go to the source and ask.

For the purposes of this study, I feel the phenomenological interview was a proper means of coming to a first person description of the experience of these athletes and, with the assistance of the interpretive group, I think I was able to effectively describe those experiences. The descriptions of the decathletes' experience produced four major themes and these are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Major Themes

The four major themes that emerged from the dialogue with these athletes were "The 1500", Distractions, An Awareness of a Need to Recognize and/or React to Distractions, and Focusing. I will now discuss each of these themes, together with their respective sub themes in relation to the existing literature.

The 1500

The 1500 is the last event of the competition. It was described as the most difficult event for these athletes and they were aware of its presence to one degree or another from the beginning of the competition. It became more and more figural as the competition progressed. Since these athletes have competed in many decathlons they know that the 1500-meters is part of the competition and that much of what they do in the first nine events will determine its significance

for the total competition. For example, a few of the athletes talked specifically about wanting to do well in earlier events so they would not have to run a fast 1500-meters.

The 1500 also is experienced as presenting certain aspects of each of the other events. Many of the distractions the athletes described in relation to the other events were present in their descriptions of the 1500-meters. Some of the athletes were aware of a need to recognize or react to these distractions, and had strategies to help them avoid the distractions and focus on what they had to do to perform well. In the overall structure of the experience described by these athletes, the 1500 meters played a significant role throughout: they reported feeling fatigued before the 1500 ever began and such fatigue had to be factored into their strategy for dealing with this event.

Knowing what was about to take place led several of these athletes "to fear" the race, and not look forward to competing in it. For some of the athletes, fear became a factor especially when an athlete felt he was not prepared as well as he would like to have been for the race. Perhaps he had been injured or just had not had the opportunity to put in the work needed to feel confident in his ability to handle the pain and fatigue he knew was inevitable.

Being aware of the other competitors (one of the major distractions participants felt necessary to overcome) was

most figural just before the 1500 meters. Each athlete discussed being aware of where he was in relation to the other competitors on the point table and what he might have to run to win became much more predictable at this time in the competition. At this point they knew what they had to run in order to overtake a competitor ahead of them in points as well as what they had to run to avoid being overtaken by someone who was behind them in the point table.

Distractions

The next major theme was Distractions. As the athletes experienced various distractions during the competition, they were frequently aware of at least two existential phenomena. The two that I will discuss are the existential concepts of the body and of the other during competition. Although the existential concepts of time and world might be discussed as well, I have chosen not to consider them at this time since they were not discussed extensively during the various interviews.

Athletes' Experiences of Their Body

As discussed, athletes in this study experienced a number of distractions during competition; because they were able to handle these distractions effectively, they felt able to perform in a memorable way. While describing their experiences of these distractions, many participants reported

being focally aware of their bodies and of the ways in which these distractions affected their perception of self. Several of these examples can be related to the concepts of the lived body as described by Shrag (1962) and Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1963). In addition, several of the athletes' descriptions of the body coincided with some of the same experiences described by participants in MacGillivray's (1986) phenomenological study of the human experience of the human body. It should be noted that not all experiences of the body were distractions for these athletes, therefore references to MacGillivray's (1986) study will be made only as they apply.

It is very difficult for human beings to relate to each other's experiences of the body. If we do not ask the person to describe her or his experience of the body, we can only assume what it might be. For this reason, Shrag (1962) has noted that all interpretations of someone's experiences of the body are necessarily self-referential; that is, each person's body is her/his own and is experienced uniquely. Merleau Ponty (1962) also emphasized this aspect of bodily experiences by pointing out that the manner in which we live our own bodies is quite different than the way in which our body is observed by others. An example of this might be the experience of pain Glenn described as a result of having a broken foot. As he noted, he was in intense pain and no objective observer would have been able to determine the

extent of this pain. Granted, Glenn's facial expressions and gestures might have given some indication of the pain he was suffering, no other people present in that situation could perceive Glenn's body in the same manner as he did. Other athletes talked of feeling fatigued and described how their bodies felt when experiencing that fatigue. Fear of certain events like the 1500 meters and the 400 meters also elicited bodily descriptions from several athletes as well. All of these descriptions of bodily experiences by these athletes relate to the Experiences of Corporeality the participants in MacGillivray's (1986) study discussed. In these situations the body as physical becomes figural and may be experienced as an instrument of gaining an end; particularly as an object where the person experiences the body as having limitations similar to other objects. Their awareness of their bodies during these various situations created distractions for these athletes to deal with and attempt to overcome.

These phenomena were experienced by these athletes as something unique to each of them. And, although the signs of these distractions may have been apparent to others around them, only the athlete himself had the ability to verbalize what that experience was like for him. None of the athletes talked about the pain or fear the other competitors were experiencing. All they were able to articulate was their own experience of these distractions, and how the distractions

played a vital role in their experience throughout the competition.

Athletes' Experiences of "the Other"

Athletes interviewed in this study reported being aware of what other competitors were doing more often than they would have liked to have been. This made it difficult for them to compete only against themselves and served as a constant distraction to them. As hard as they tried, they were unable to focus completely on themselves without being affected by what other competitors were doing. The close proximity in which they had to compete with each other made their desire for complete concentration on the self virtually impossible; therefore, each athlete had somehow to deal with the other in an effective manner and some were better than others at handling this situation.

As Shrag (1962) has suggested, there are two experiences human beings describe when being with or around other people: alienation and communion. The athletes in this study were not able to ignore the other competitors completely, and only a few were able to objectify the other and use him to the competitor's benefit. By experiencing the other in an alienated fashion, the athlete reported being able to "use the other" as a means of "pushing" himself harder or as a "gauge" to monitor his own progress. By experiencing the

other in this way, the competitor was able to keep the other competitors from being a complete distraction.

Several athletes experienced another distraction when they had a sense of connection with the other competitors. Shrag (1962) has suggested that communion (i.e., connection) takes place when the other is acknowledged as a person that can experience a co-presence in such a way that individual freedoms are mutually acknowledged. This connection was described as camaraderie among these athletes and was described as getting in the way of being able to compete as effectively as the athlete wanted. There were times when they felt they were too friendly and respectful of the other, and found it difficult to separate friendships and competition. Such a state of affairs created a complex and ambiguous mode of relating to the other among these athletes.

Camaraderie was experienced as a "two-edged sword" by these athletes. At times it was a distraction-- because it was difficult for them to separate friendship from competition-- whereas at other times it was a positive experience because it allowed them to relax together between events. In this latter case, camaraderie with other competitors was described as a "refuge" from the pressure of the competition. Several decathletes indicated that it would have been mentally exhausting for them to concentrate on the decathlon from the time it began until it was over at the end of the second day. Even though it was difficult, these

athletes were able to maintain a balance between various aspects of camaraderie; that is, they were able to relax and enjoy the company of their competitors while still being able to focus attention on an event when it came time to compete. A few of the athletes noted that they felt a camaraderie with the others only to a certain extent and they did not help the others or socialize with them until they were assured of the outcome of the competition.

In the two and half years I have spent as a sport psychology consultant, I have had the opportunity to talk with and observe many athletes in various competitive situations. It seems as though each athlete is unique in her/his ability and preference to concentrate during the entire time they are competing or to relax at certain times during a run, in between events or shots. Much like other athletes who compete over long periods of time in one competition, such as runners and golfers, decathletes have to decide whether to think continuously about the event and their strategies or to choose opportune times to relax. Fortunately for the decathletes in this study, they had others they could relate to (and utilize as an outlet) if they wanted. Even though each athlete reported experiencing a number of distractions throughout the competition, at one time or another all were aware that they had to do something to combat such distractions.

Awareness of a Need to Recognize and/or React to Distractions

It was very important for these athletes to recognize or react to the distractions they encountered during the competition. Several of the athletes described an experience of wanting to narrow personal awareness to only a limited number of things when performing. This process is referred to as attentional narrowing and, according to Cox (1994), is best understood in terms of cue utilization. In other words, there are many different environmental cues (or stimuli) surrounding an athlete when he/she is performing. Easterbrook (1959) indicates that attentional narrowing is a function of available environmental cues and that some of these cues are relevant and necessary for quality performance whereas others are irrelevant and can impair performance. Often in pressure situations, when arousal level is high, it is difficult for the athlete to narrow her/his attention to only that which is relevant at the time. Essentially, they seem more easily distracted and are unable to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant cues. Ideally the athlete would be able to distinguish between the two and concentrate only on the relevant cues.

Orlick (1990) further notes that when an athlete is focused in sport she/he is aware of only those things that are critical to the performance, sometimes to the exclusion of everything else. It is as if the athlete and the

performance become one and nothing else exists. Such a description accords with the concept of habit as discussed by Merleau-Ponty (1962), best performances occur when an athlete is totally connected with the performance, often to the point of "performing on auto pilot and letting the body lead" (Orlick, 1990). This also coincides with the theme of "Experience of Engagement" in MacGillivray's (1986) study. The sub theme of Vitality as described by MacGillivray is particularly relevant here as the person experiencing Vitality feels engaged with little or no experience of the body and is "caught up" in her/his immediate world.

To handle distractions and focus on the relevant cues, athletes in this study utilized various strategies they had learned either from their coaches or on their own through years of practice and competition. By utilizing these strategies they were not only able to be unaffected by the distractions, they were also able to focus on what they needed to do to perform well. Having said this, I will discuss the fourth major theme: Focusing.

Focusing

The fourth theme was entitled Focusing because many of the athletes talked at great lengths about "wanting to focus" on certain aspects of their performance, and, the word "focus" came up quite often in their descriptions. The result of utilizing the various strategies mentioned earlier

coincides with much of what other researchers have found when asking athletes to describe their experiences when performing exceptionally well. For example, similar to athletes in interview studies conducted by Loehr (1982), Garfield and Bennett (1984), George (1988), Cohn (1991), and Ecklund (1991), athletes in the present study also described a task relevant focus for a particular event as a result of certain strategies. More specifically, they reported utilizing strategies such as imagery/visualization and keys or cues to "narrow" their focus of attention. When athletes reported that they were able to do this effectively, they felt it allowed them to concentrate on their performance in the present task and to be relatively unaware of surroundings. Granted, this did not occur all of the time, but when it did these athletes reported being able to narrow their focus on what they were in "control" of.

Another essential component of being able to focus for these athletes was their experience of confidence in their ability to deal with distractions and to perform at a high level. This was a result of proper training and, on several occasions throughout the interviews, participants talked about the importance of training. Knowing they had "put in the time" to prepare themselves gave them the confidence they needed to overcome the anxieties and doubts that often accompany pressure situations. Thus, they were able to focus on the relevant aspects of the task before them. These

athletes also felt that because they had experienced proper training in the time leading up to the competition, they were able to be consistent in their performance. For these athletes, being able to be consistent in the decathlon was their main objective. They did not necessarily feel like they had to have exceptional performances in all of their events, but they did want to be consistently good. Without proper training, they most likely would not have been able to accomplish this.

Experiences of Each of the Ten Events

The decathlon is designed to be the "ultimate challenge" in track and field. The order in which the ten events occur and the time in between events makes it very difficult for athletes in this type of competition to gain momentum after a good event and carry it through several events. Both days begin with a sprinting event, followed by three field events, and end with a longer running race.

The running events, which include the 100-meter dash, 400-meter dash, 110-meter hurdles and the 1500-meter run were described as involving many of the same distractions: weather, fatigue, awareness of other competitors, pain, and lack of preparation. These events appear to be less technical than the field events, in terms of the athletes having specific keys to focus on; however participants reported much more strategy in these events than in the field

events. Similar to the discussion in the section on the athletes being aware of a need to recognize or react to distractions, the athlete had to utilize proper focusing strategies depending on the particular event he was competing in at the time.

Martens (1987a, pp. 113-115) addresses the phenomenon of an athlete being more technical or analytical in her/his thought process during the performance of certain athletic skills. He describes this in the context of the right and left hemispheres of the brain and, although often oversimplified, the distinction between the right and left hemispheres of the brain is potentially useful in the analysis of sport. This right and left distinction could be a metaphor for what is required during performance and not really referring to physical location.

The left hemisphere is considered the *Analyzer* which is used in learning new skills, developing strategies when competing, and correcting flaws in technique. This hemisphere processes information one step at a time and is guided by verbal self-instructions that help cue the athlete as to the type and sequence of movements to be performed. The left hemisphere also creates a "blueprint" of how new skills are to be performed. The right hemisphere is considered the *Integrator* and is used as a control for the way an athlete integrates the parts of a skill into a complex whole. The step by step blueprint developed by the *Analyzer*

is converted to a complex image. Thus, the Analyzer or left hemisphere is utilized more when an athlete is learning a new skill and once the skill becomes familiar the Integrator or right hemisphere is primarily used to control the performance of the skill.

Orlick (1986) notes that competition is not the time to focus too much on technical information; it is the time to trust your body, to focus ahead, and go. The six field events which included the long jump, shot put, high jump on the first day, and the discus, pole vault, javelin on the second, were described by these participants as being very technical events. For this reason, they reported having to constantly struggle with narrowing their focus to a few specific keys or cues. In field events of the decathlon, it is important that an athlete maintain good technique to perform well; this can be accomplished, however, without being "too technical" and "connecting the dots" of the various parts of the skill. An athlete should concentrate on one cue that best represents or results in the outcome she/he desires. Five different athletes talked about doing well in these events because they were not too technical or mechanical and they felt able to relax and "let it happen".

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to describe the experience of a group of elite decathletes while performing

in their most memorable or meaningful performance. By providing these athletes an opportunity to describe their experience in the context of a phenomenological interview, I feel I was able to allow them to describe this experience with minimal departure from the dialogue. This interview format is much like the one-on-one sessions an effective sport psychology consultant has with an athlete. When an athlete comes to a consultant for assistance in developing a systematic approach to competition, it is important the athlete be given the opportunity to describe his/her experiences. The consultant should not have a-priori assumptions about what the athlete might want to discuss, and it is important for the consultant to follow the dialogue with appropriate questions. By listening in this way, the consultant is better able to ascertain where the athlete needs assistance and expedite the process of effective mental training.

In this particular study decathletes were chosen as participants. The decathlon is one of the most unique sporting events in the world and it represents a maximum challenge to those who attempt to compete in it. Much like the athletes Orlick (1990) described when he talked of the elements of excellence, the athletes I interviewed were well practiced in overcoming distractions, had the ability to focus on each task when it was time, were able to image themselves performing in a positive manner, and had put in

the quality training needed to give themselves confidence. The competition they described was a special time in their careers and they were triumphant in their own mind whether they actually won the competition or not.

It is interesting to note that during the experiences described by these athletes, their coaches are rarely mentioned until just before the 1500-meter run. At this time the coaches become more important because they assist the athlete in determining what place he is in relative to the other competitors. The coach also assists the athlete in determining how fast he must run the 1500 meters to secure a certain place. This is important to note because it seems that much of what these athletes talk about in their descriptions is a result of what their coach or coaches have taught them, yet the relationship with their coach is not figural until the competition is nearly finished. This is in stark contrast to the camaraderie and connection these athletes described feeling toward the other competitors.

While it was not my intention to generalize the results of this study to other athletes, I chose elite athletes in particular because I feel there is a tremendous amount of valuable information that athletes, coaches and sport psychology consultants can glean from them and their experiences during significant times in their competitive careers. It is important that we continue to look to elite

athletes in various sports for insights into how they are able to achieve excellence.

Implications for Coaches and Sport Psychology Consultants

It is apparent from the descriptions given by these athletes that there are many distractions to be dealt with in a proper manner in order to perform at an optimal level. Many of the distractions these athletes described are the same for athletes in other sports. In their book entitled "The Psychology of Coaching", Vernacchia, McGuire, and Cook (1992) provide a sound formula for helping athletes become competition-tough and better able to handle distractions in various situations. The formula is: Mental Toughness = Anticipation + Preparation. These decathletes indicated that because they were able to anticipate and prepare, they were able to perform in a way that was memorable for them. Coaches and sport psychology consultants can assist athletes in both of these areas. By helping athletes anticipate as many distractions as possible and by providing instruction on ways to prepare for these distractions, the athletes will have an invaluable tool to utilize when competing.

Athletes in this study also noted the importance of feeling confident in their preparation once competition got underway. Coaches and sport psychology consultants must first ensure that the athletes are confident in their

preparation, then they must teach them to remind themselves of how hard they have worked and that they are "in fact" prepared to compete. Positive reminders of this nature should serve to help the athlete relax and to be an "athlete" when it is time to compete instead of doubting themselves.

Once competition begins, and all of the anticipation and preparation is over, it is important for the coach (assuming the sport psychology consultant is not directly involved during the actual competition) to limit the type and amount of information given to the athlete. As athletes in this study noted, they wanted to narrow their focus to a few relevant things when the pressure to perform was present. Coaches/consultants should prepare athletes, help them anticipate, and when the competition is tough offer positive reminders. If the coach/consultant is not sure whether or not the athlete needs more information, it is probably better not to say anything at all.

For coaches and sport psychology consultants working specifically with decathletes and/or other athletes who must compete over long periods of time in a single competition, it is important to assist them in finding the most comfortable way to conserve their energies and still to be able to be at peak readiness when they need to. It is also important to remind the athlete that consistency is very important in doing well in an event such as the decathlon. Because it contains ten events, it is also important to remind an

athlete that one poor event must not be allowed to affect performance in later events. By helping the athlete develop strategies to analyze the poor event in a positive manner and to move on to the next one without looking back, the coach and sport psychology consultant can be a positive influence in helping the athlete perform consistently well.

Similar to many of the distractions described by present elite athletes, a poor event is something they cannot control once it is over. All of the athletes in this study described distractions that were outside of their personal control and they indicated they knew they should not be aware of them, but they were, and it created unnecessary distractions. Since this is a difficult phenomenon to overcome, the coach and sport psychology consultant must continually emphasize the importance of focusing only on those things the athlete is directly in control of. Such focusing must be practiced on a regular basis since it is such a difficult thing to achieve consistently.

The last implication from this study deals with the importance of athlete enjoyment. Each of the athletes in this study enjoyed the competition they described. They had worked hard and prepared themselves well for that particular competition. Some of the experiences described were at a very high level of competition, yet all participants reported being able to enjoy the moment. Coaches and sport psychology consultants can help athletes enjoy competition much more if

they strive to accomplish the things mentioned above and de-emphasize the importance of winning. By treating competition as a reward for all of the hard work that has been done, athletes are more likely to be relaxed and enjoy the experience which often results in quality performances.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest that researchers in the field of sport psychology might want to consider alternative interview methodologies such as the phenomenological interview as a means of learning more about the experience of athletes. Qualitative methodologies offer the possibility of gaining real insight into the experience of those being interviewed. As Hanson and Newburg (1992, p. 48) ask, "What better way for athletes or coaches to learn about success in their respective sport than through detailed, descriptive accounts of the lives of others who were in similar situations and have reached a high level of performance?"

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Introduction Letter
and Participant Information Sheet

Dear Decathlon Participant,

I am currently a graduate student pursuing a Ph.D. in Sport Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am employed by the men's athletic department at UT as a sport psychology consultant helping athletes develop systematic mental plans for competition.

I recently had the opportunity to conduct some research involving two elite decathlon participants. The study involved interviewing these athletes as to their experience during their best overall performance in a decathlon. The results of this study were very interesting and I would like to expand on them by interviewing other elite decathlon participants in regard to their most memorable or meaningful performance. After discussing this research with your head coaches, they are very supportive and feel this is a worthwhile endeavor. This will be the emphasis of research for my dissertation and an in-depth analysis of the interviews will be conducted. You will have access to the results of your interview and perhaps gain further insight to your experience when performing in a memorable or meaningful manner.

If you agree to participate, please fill out the attached information sheet and I will contact you at a later date in the Fall to schedule a time and place that is convenient for you to participate in the interview. The interview will last approximately one and a half to two hours, and will involve you answering some demographic questions as well as a few open-ended type questions about your performance. All results will be confidential and every precaution will be taken to maintain the integrity of the study. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Gregory A. Dale

DECATHLON PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at
the following address:

Greg Dale
2100 Wilson Road #733
Knoxville, Tennessee 37912

Home Phone
Work Phone

APPENDIX B

Member Checking Letter

Dear Decathlon Participant:

I hope things are going well for you this spring. I know it is a busy time for you.

Enclosed please find a brief overview of what I perceive to be your experience during your most memorable or meaningful performance. I would appreciate it if you would read it and provide any comments that would make the description of your experience more detailed.

I have also included a stamped envelope for you to return your comments to me. Please feel free to write on the paper where needed and return to me as soon as possible. Thanks again for helping me in this project. I am looking forward to seeing you in Knoxville in June. Good luck!

Sincerely,

Gregory Dale

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

I_____ hereby volunteer to participate in a research study examining my experience during a particular decathlon competition.

The study will be conducted in an informal interview format with only the investigator and myself present. I have been told that a tape recorder will be used to help gather information. I have been told that there are no mental or physical risks involved in this study and that the confidentiality of my comments will be protected and my name will not be used in any resulting publications without my permission.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have been informed that I can ask further questions at any time. Finally, I have been told that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without penalty.

Date:_____ Participant:_____

Telephone Number:_____

Project Director

Gregory Dale

Address:

Phone:

APPENDIX D

Sample Interview

This interview does not contain demographic information that was obtained during the initial phase of the interview. This was deleted to help ensure the anonymity of the participant. The interview begins with the initial question regarding his experience of his most memorable or meaningful performance. The letter "I" represents the investigator and the letter "R" represents the respondent in this study.

- I: I would like for you to take a few minutes and think about your most meaningful or memorable decathlon performance and describe and tell me what you were aware of during that competition.
- R: The most memorable was the NCAA Championship because I went in as the favorite and there was more pressure on me. But I have always liked the pressure and I can still remember everything about it. I remember the day before going out to the track and looking at it and thinking in two days I am going to win here. I had no doubt that I was going to win right before it happened.
- I: What was that feeling like for you?
- R: I was there the year before and I observed it. I got second the year before and I was picked to get second and that is what I got. My roommate who wasn't even picked to place was bouncing around the room knowing he was going to win. He kept telling me he was going to win and I kept saying you are crazy, no one is even picking you to place. He just kept saying I know that I am going to win. He was just hyper and he couldn't control himself. He ended up winning and the next year I knew I was going to win and I remember thinking that I was only saying that because I remember him saying that and it happened to him. My roommate the year I won was thinking I was crazy. He was a good athlete, but he didn't expect himself to do well and he didn't. But I just kept telling him that I was going to win, I just knew it was going to happen.
- I: So the pressure was not a negative thing for you?
- R: No, I thought it was great. It was the best thing about it, especially because I was putting more pressure on myself because I was telling him and everyone else I saw that I was going to win. Um, and I really remember that day going in to the stadium it was a good day. I wasn't worried about the wind, not worried about the surface or the competition. I just really wanted to go out there and do the meet and get done with it. When we started there was hardly anyone in the stands and I am surprised I remember that because I don't remember it bothering me.

I: Is that normal if there is not a crowd there to watch you?

R: Well, it goes either way because I have done very well with no one there which is normal for a decathlon and I have done very well with large crowds. But I remember that day we kind of drifted in and we all pretty much knew each other because we compete against each other all of the time and we are all pretty good friends. We didn't go out there to be social, but to compete. Things started well, not as well as I would have liked but things were going all right. As the day went on things kept getting better. The first event was good, not great. The second event was good, not great and the third event was great. The fourth was good and the last one on that first day was my best ever in that event. I think I was in third after the first day which is unusual for me. I still had no quams about where I was and felt I was right where I needed to be for the second day. Um, I remember warming down real well and we were at altitude because we were in Provo, Utah. It affected me some and I felt light on my feet the second day while I was warming up. I didn't have a great hurdle race which is not uncommon for me. I didn't have a great race and I think I started to have some negative feelings there. But, I got into the discus and that had been a problem event for me and I remember getting there and there were some really good throwers in there. I just did what I had trained to do over and over in practice. I didn't really try to go for a big throw, I just wanted to get on my form and I remember I had three good throws, not great and I remember that is when I got kind of a wake-up call. I had been doing well, but not as well as I should have at this meet. I mean nothing had gone wrong and a couple of things had gone really well. This is where I just said this is what I really want and lets start taking some chances and lets start being better than you have or as good as you planned on being. So the pole-vault came and I vaulted really well. A couple of people stumbled in this event and I didn't let the wind affect me. Winds usually affect me, but I told myself to keep doing the best I can and I won the pole-vault. The next event was the pole-vault which is my best event on the second day. I remember there was a crowd there by then and that got me really excited. Actually, the I noticed the crowd in the pole-vault and I started vaulting really well. They were really into the event because it was right out in front of them and they seemed to be really into the vault. Um, so every time I went over the bar they would cheer and it just made you want to do well. The javelin came and I knew I could make up some points in this event. I didn't really try to go for a big throw, I just wanted to get on my form and I remember I had three good throws, not great and I remember that is when I got kind of a wake-up call. I had been doing well, but not as well as I should have at this meet. I mean nothing had gone wrong and a couple of things had gone really well. Um, I threw a good javelin, not a great one though. I think it had something to do with the thin air not holding the javelin up in the air. I had a good throw, not anything I was upset about. But, the guy who was in first had a very good throw which was his life time best. It was kind of shocking because I realized that the events hadn't been as high as I wanted them to be, but the finish which is what I always thought it was going to come down to. That was always how I expected to have my big win. Um, the last event was the 1500 and it is my

worst event and it is the weakest for most decathletes. And, everytime I dreamed about it, even though I hate the 1500 and I don't think you will talk to a decathlete who doesn't with the exception of Joe. I always dreamed it would come down to the 1500 and I was going to have to run my best to win. I always thought that was funny that was the way I imagined it being. Because, that was the last thing I wanted everyone to do was run hard for the last one. So, it came down to he was 74 points up on me because I had only made up a few points in the javelin. He was just a terrible 1500 runner, just terrible. I had no doubt in my mind that I was going to make up all of my points here. But, there is always the fact that were at altitude and I could be hurting more than I should and he could run his heart out. So, that is what it came down to, I had to run the 1500 well. I always wanted to have to run hard and make it hurt and have a great time it would be worth more. I figured the more pain that I went through and the more I could put into it the more it would be worth. I think that all of the dreams and the visualizations came down to was that I wanted to be able to give it my all in the painful event and that would make it worth more. And, I think it did. While I ran the first lap on the pace I wanted to he was right on my shoulder. Which I thought was nice, because I knew if I went too fast I would lose contact with him in the beginning. I knew this guy was going to try hang right with me and I knew that if he did that he would never finish the race. Uh, so the second lap I came throughout 800 meters and he was 10 meters behind me. I just remember he sounded like he was going to die and that was good because were only half way through the race especially because he was a terrible runner and we were at altitude. So, I thought I would put some distance between the two of us and I thought if he lost contact with me he would lose it big. Once I made my move at the half mark, once he sees me go away, I wanted him to be tired so he wouldn't even think about going with me. I told my coaches that no matte where he was in the race to tell me that he was right behind me. So, I was going around the track and I couldn't hear him breathing and I knew he was at least 20 meters behind me and I had to beat him by at least 14 seconds. So, with 300 meters to go I heard someone tell me I had him by 30 meters. And I just said, "I've got him" but I wanted to make sure just in case he had saved something for the end. I didn't think he had, but I wanted to make sure and I also wanted to run a good time. Before, I really thought about I was in 4th place in the 1500 and I have never finished high in the 1500. The one guy from our school was going to win the race no matter what, he had a fantastic 1500. So, I just went for the guy in third and passed him, I was just running all out. I couldn't even see straight and the altitude was affecting me. As I came around the last turn everyone was cheering and the guy in second was right in front of me. So, the guy in first was finishing as we were coming around the last turn. The guy in second was 10 meters in front of me and I kind of looked over my shoulder and I saw the guy I had to beat by 14 seconds was 100 meters back and he was already 30 seconds behind. I took off, just screaming and it was kind of surprising because I could hear the people screaming and I knew that I was moving pretty fast, but I still felt like everything was going slow. I wasn't worried about it and that was strange because

usually if you are running fast and you feel like you are running slow you are worried about it. This time I wasn't worried about it, because I wanted to make this last forever. During the last 100 meters I knew that I was going to be NCAA champion which is something that I had wanted ever since I began competing in the decathlon. It was weird, I knew in 100 meters I would be the NCAA champion and I wanted that 100 meters to last forever. It felt like it lasted longer than it took to run. Every step I became happier and I passed the guy in front of me at the finish line and got second. That was the highest I had ever finished in 1500. It was strange because I never even looked down the track to see when the other guy was going to finish because I knew I was going to win. You are never quite sure until it happens, but I knew then that I had won. That is the competition that I remember the most.

I: There is great detail in your description and there are several things that I would like for you to expand on if I may.

R: Sure.

I: Can we go back to the beginning where you said you just wanted to have a good time. How important was that to you?

R: There is a time in the decathlon when you are just starting out you really want to do well, but it is just something you want to learn and you have a good time with it naturally. Then once you have done enough of them and you get better at it you do not have as much fun. That meet was probably the last time I had a really good time competing in the decathlon in a while. After that meet I stopped competing against collegians and stepped up a level and begin competing against older, more experienced guys who are ranked in the world. There the whole reference changed from being in contention to win at each meet to hopefully placing high. When the whole mentality changed, it wasn't something I did at first, but two weeks after this meet I competed at the US. Nationals and I got fourth and was happy. Never before had I been happy with fourth place. But, I was competing against older guys who had more experience than I did and had just as much success as I did in college. I got fourth and everyone told me that was great. I thought it was pretty good and over the next few years I kept finishing fourth or fifth and I was happy with it whereas before I was never happy with a finish like that. But it was just that next step and I started having less fun and it became more of going out, stay focused and worry. Where before it was go out and have fun, concentrate and do well. So, now at what I consider the twilight of my career I have made a point of having fun at it again. If I don't do well then that is bad, but keep concentrating and try to do well and if you don't; have fun with it. Always look for something positive and don't always look for something that might be negative. So I feel like I have come full circle. I had fun in the beginning, I had a time where I had to fight hard to have fun and would hate doing meets and would try to avoid all of the meets except the major ones. Now I am back to having fun again.

I: What is it like to worry as opposed to having fun?

R: It really is horrible and every time you get an event over with you are just happy it is over and you are one step closer to the end. Whereas when you are having fun you look back on the event and look forward to the next one. You never really worry about how much more you have to go. You can enjoy the moment more, but

if you are worrying about everything that has happened, everything that might happen or everything that will happen it eats at you till the finish. You start to not care how you finish the competition, but rather just finishing. And, it comes with the increase in competition and I think I handled it all right. I would look back after a meet was over and think I had a good time. But, I wouldn't have a good time during it unless I was having a great competition. Even then, right away I would stop enjoying it and start thinking about the next event. I couldn't enjoy the moment because I would say for a split second that was good and then I would say, "oop you gotta do better". I can remember specific times like when I was high jumping and have a good mark and would get excited for a minute and then tell myself that I can't celebrate yet. If you watch other people when they high jump they will usually miss an attempt right after they celebrate clearing a height. They feel they have done their best and they won't go any higher. So, you pretty much try to suppress your excitement and save your energy for the next attempt. It was if that wasn't good enough. The high jump is a good example because those guys will be stone faced after a good jump. They aren't really having a good time. They do their best and they are like stone. These are usually your Russians and Europeans who act like that was nothing, just wait till you see the next one. I guess it all depends on the type of person you are as to how you react.

I: So, on that day at the NCAA meet you had a good time?

R: Yeah, I really did have a good time. You know you always look back on a meet and remember having a better time than you probably did during. But, that was the last meet of my collegiate career and I stepped out into a different world.

I: You know you mentioned the events on the second day in greater detail. I was wondering if we could go back to the first day and have you tell me more about it.

R: The first day I had already seen the heat sheets and I knew I was in a fast heat. That was good because we were at altitude which you have faster times at altitude. There were three guys I remember in particular that were pretty fast in my heat. There was one guy who was pretty fast but nothing to worry about. I got out in the 100 pretty fast and I was just off Don who was a good 100 meter runner and I remember going down the track and running well. I ran right at or actually a little short of a PR. Don finished just ahead of me. It was a good time and we expected a little better time at altitude. But, it was early morning and it was a little chilly. I guess we both had some nerves before the race. I was in fourth place after the 100 which was good. Um, the long jump, nobody got off really good marks and that surprised us as well. I jumped 23'4 or 5. I was really running down the runway fast and really trying to run off the board which was different than I usually do. I don't really go down and try to pound off the board. I was trying to make big things happen in the long jump and really wasn't doing many of the things that I had practiced. I still placed fourth in the long jump. Don and another guy had good jumps and they were ahead of me. But, they only jumped about 4 or 5 inches further than me and they are usually about a foot longer than I am. Um, but after the long jump I started thinking that the first two speed events are over and the shot-put is coming up and that is my event. And, I didn't

want anyone to beat me in the shot, although Pedro who finished second was a good shot putter and I had just thrown against him at the Pac 10 meet the week before where he beat me. I thought I could beat him and I threw my best. I threw 50 feet even. That was something that I had always wanted to throw in a decathlon. I was very happy with that and Pedro threw just a little further than I did. But, that was OK because he didn't pick up many points on me. All of the other guys threw well below us and we were at the top. That was where we started stretching out a lead a little bit. I was in third place at this time. Then came the high jump and there were a lot of good high jumpers in this meet, a lot of good ones. It was a good place to do well and Don and Sam had good jumps. Pedro jumped not as good as he was used to but he still jumped well. So, we kind of had a separation as five or six of made a gap between us and the other ten guys competing that you usually don't see until the later on in the competition. That is always nice because you always want to know who is around you in the points and it helps to be able to focus on them because those people are gonna lift you to a higher level. I kind of knew there were four guys around me that I was going to be competing with at their level. Always do your best in the decathlon and you really can't worry too much about who you are competing against. You have to compete against your self.

- I: Yes, I was going to ask you about that. You seemed really aware of how the other guys were doing.
- R: Yeah, that is unusual because most guys don't worry about what the other guys are doing. At least they say they don't. Whether they do or not we will find out. I like to compete against other people as well as myself. I think everyone does or at least they should. In my decathlons as far as place goes, I remember my decathlons well, like I remember my first one and if you told me where my fifth one was I could tell you how high I jumped and how fast I ran. It is always nice when you are competing with someone. We like to say with someone instead of against someone. But, I do both.
- I: What effect did knowing where the other guys were during that day?
- R: It helped me because in the next race or event I wanted to beat that person if he had beaten me in the previous event. I wanted to make up points that I had lost. It helps me to keep track of what I am doing and where I am going. If you can concentrate on one person you can concentrate less on all of the others.
- I: You mentioned points several times. Were you aware of the points you had as you went through the events?
- R: I have always been aware of the points, but not really concerned with exactly how many. I know when they raise the bar to a certain height it is worth a certain number of points. You get about 27 points for each height and about the same in the pole vault. In the shot you get about 15 to 18 points for each foot depending on where you start. But, I think it is good. It is just part of the mental aspect of the decathlon, knowing your place or where you are and how you are doing point wise and how you are feeling and what you should do next.
- I: So going into that last event you knew what your point total was and that of the other competitors?

- R: Oh yeah, most people keep track themselves. I just listen to the p.a. to hear how I am doing. They are always blaring them out, how many points you have or how far you are behind.
- I: What affect did that have on you that day to always hear your score?
- R: It does add some pressure. My coaches always want to tell me how many seconds I have to beat someone by in the 1500 or whatever. I always tell them to not tell me because I will go out and run the best race I can and if it is enough it is enough and if not, it just isn't. Of course if you tell me a time like I had to beat someone by 20 seconds to win, I am probably going to try to make him lose by 18 seconds rather than try to beat him. A lot of people like to know, but I am not confident in the 1500 so I don't gamble with it.
- I: Would it be safe to say that it mattered less in the events you were confident in than those in which you were not as confident?
- R: Right, if it is a strong event you worry less. But, that is also the place where you expect to make leaps and bounds on everybody else. The place becomes less important there and the performance becomes more important. You don't worry about how many points you are going to score you just try to do your best and get above the other person.
- I: You also mentioned that we went and that we were going to do this. You said you know each other and you are good friends. Can you talk a little bit about what that was like for you that day at the NCAA meet?
- R: Yeah, um see I feel like I am different than a lot of the guys. Every decathlete I meet I feel like is a friend. They are all just great people. I don't think I have ever met one that wasn't. I don't know why because some of the other events have people that can't stand each other. In the decathlon, I don't know if it is because we share the same experience and we are with each other for two days while we compete rather than the 100 where you are with each other for 10 seconds and you go separate ways. But it is always great to see the guys again and be together and compete with them when you see them. I think we are all good friends and that is probably one of the most important things about my decathlons is the people I have met, places I have seen and the friends I have made. But, I have always tried to stay away from making a social function out of the decathlon. I used to do it before and it always seemed to ruin my decathlon because I really couldn't focus on what I was doing. A lot of people they are out there really enjoying themselves and trying to catch up on what they have been doing. I just get by myself and alienate myself during the actual competition. Afterwards we are the best of friends still. And if they want me to catch their mark or tell them something about their form I will help them out any way I can, but I still consider myself competing against them. I don't want them to do bad, it is just that I am competing against them and they are competing against me. So lets just save the social function for later. It was really good to see them but I didn't dwell on it. A lot of people do dwell on it and I have never seen them do well in that case because they are so excited about seeing someone that they don't worry about their decathlon. I have always tried not to do that and some people have said that they

- didn't like to be around me during the competition. But, it is just that I didn't have anything to say to them at the time.
- I: Was it like that during those two days at NCAA's?
- R: Very much and people were ready. My coach even asked uh I work mostly with my assistant coach and my head coach came up to him and said that, "I don't think R likes me at all" and the coach that I always work with told him that I was always like that when I competed and to not take it personally. So everyone thought I was an asshole I guess you could say. My assistant coach the one I always work with understood because he was a high level competitor and he was pretty much the same way. He wasn't there to goof around. I didn't go out of my way to be friendly during the competition.
- I: Would you trust people from other countries to get a mark for you or would you get a mark for them?
- R: Yeah, I think decathletes are pretty much the same the world over. We don't go out to hurt each other and we are all honest because we all share the same feelings for the decathlon and we all go through the same things physically and mentally. So I trust them as much as any one of the guys from the US. I have never known a decathlete to lie about a mark because there are always three or four guys watching and someone would have come by and said no your mark was here. I trust them.
- I: Earlier you mentioned the mental preparation during that day. I was wondering if you could take me back to the beginning of that particular competition and talk a little bit more about your preparation throughout the competition?
- R: What I realized about myself and my mental preparation was that I had some of the gold medalist talk at the _____ clinics. The mental training that I discovered was the best was to train hard for each event because while you are training you practice the way you are going to compete. You simulate competition, but I think just by getting proficient in an event and getting confident with the event is the best mental preparation. Because when you get into the competition you feel secure with it. I also do visualization which I think all of the decathletes do. I usually do that at night before I go to sleep. Two days before a competition I really focus on relaxation and visualization and two nights before I will go through the first day's events.
- I: So you actually went over each event in your mind for that particular meet?
- R: Yeah, I start with seeing myself leave the hotel and see myself going to the track by bus or however I am going to get there. Then I go through all of the events and I think about all of the marks I want to accomplish. They aren't something outlandish but something that is very good for me but reasonable also.
- I: When you say you saw yourself, what is that like for you. I guess I am asking from what perspective do you see yourself? Is it as if you are looking at yourself on a movie screen or is it from within as if you are looking out from your own eyes?
- R: I see myself from within, with my own eyes. I think that helps in respect to what I have to do otherwise you would be like outside looking at someone else doing it. I never really thought about how I see myself perform, but whenever I see myself running down the runway I see the pole out in front of me. But, I think visualization was important and I did one day the first night and

the second day one night before the competition. I do the whole decathlon in my head and I felt it helped me. I could actually feel my heart rate pick up when I was visualizing what I was doing. It made me more comfortable when I was actually in the meet having feeling like I had been through it before. The most stressful time of the decathlon is right before the 100 meters and after it is over you feel like you have had the weight of the world taken off your shoulders. You can see it in other people's faces and hear them say it as well. The fact that have actually started and you are on your way. Nothing can change the fact that we have actually started. Once you get started it is much better because waiting to get started is like preparing to go on stage and actually it is probably worse than going on stage. It was like that at that particular meet and it has been like that every other time as well.

I: Can you talk a little bit about what that nervousness was like for you that day?

R: I didn't even try to minimize it because I had gotten used to it, and by becoming used to it I accepted it and expected it. I think that helped somewhat and to know that other people were going through it also. But, I think Bruce Jenner said it best when he said in his book that the decathlon is 80% mental and 20% physical. I agree with that and of course there are a lot of people out there who are more physical than mental and there are a lot that are more mental than physical. It kind of balances it out. It is a very mental event and you will find that a lot of the decathletes enjoy mental games. Lets say, chess, we all like chess I would say. That would be a safe assumption. We all love to play cards when we go on trips. We always play cards like crazy, but we always play games like gin and spades because you really have to think about what the other person has. We all like to use our concentration skills. I think we would all be just as happy competing in a mental game like chess. We all like the physical aspect of the sport and that is what people like to see, but uh I think all of us like the stress.

I: Again, going back to that competition at NCAA's, can you think of some specific things that occurred like what you are talking about?

R: Um, I remember since I was in third or fourth place that other people thought the guys in first or second were gonna win and it really didn't bother me too much. Actually, I thought it was kind of good because I have always preferred to be not in the limelight, more in the shadow. Not so it would be more of a surprise that I won but more that nobody was really watching me adding that extra pressure that you don't need. If you can sit in second and win at the last minute that is fine with me. And, I don't know it just made it easier because the guy who was in front everyone expected him to win because he is already there and he can only go down. If you are in third or fourth and if you can sneak around and go up on him..... first place in the decathlon is a tough place to be in because everyone wants to be where you are and all can do is try to hold on.

I: Was that an advantage for you that day to not be in first place?

R: Probably, but I didn't think of it in that way, I just wanted to do the best I could in each of the events. I could have moved into first and it wouldn't have bothered me. I wouldn't have

turned it down if I got there. But, I felt if I could stay close to the front I would do well because the pole vault and the javelin were good events for me. The 1500, I knew was going to ruin me.

- I: That is interesting that you felt that the 1500 was going to ruin you even if you were close to the top.
- R: That is my weakest event by far and it is probably that way for all of the other guys except for my roommate who won the 1500.
- I: Can we go back to the second day, the hurdle race, you said it wasn't a great race and you had some negative feelings about it afterwards? Would you describe that experience for me?
- R: I said I didn't have a good race. It wasn't horrible, I just uh, felt like I ran all right but my time wasn't all that good. It was probably fatigue from the first day. Um, I just didn't feel really on or sharp. I was disappointed in the time which was a surprise that it was as slow as it was. I did beat one person in my race who had a bad race. I had to gain some points on him. I liked him, but it was good for me that he had a bad race because I had an OK race and picked up some points on him. So I got rid of one guy in that race, but I wasn't real happy with my race. I don't know why because as I look back I warmed up well. Hurdles have never been a strong event for me but it has been all right. I just don't know why it was slower than it felt.
- I: What were you going through as you went from the hurdles to the next event?
- R: The discus, I had been training horribly and that was the one event that I was worried about and I guess my coaches were worried about. Later, they told me that was the one that was really scaring them. But, I had always considered myself a good discus thrower with the exception of these last few months. And, I remember getting in there and saying that everything feels good and everything should go well. Um, and I went in there and threw an easy one first. I wanted to get in a safe throw and this one was a little too easy, a little too safe. It wasn't a good enough mark that I could change anything and go for a big throw. So, I remember getting in there for the second throw and wanting to throw a medium throw. I wanted to relax and I wasn't thinking hard and I wasn't thinking easy like last time either. It went pretty well, the second throw, it wasn't anything great and it wasn't real bad either. Then the third throw came and I started to think that we better get a good throw off here and I tried to throw it and it caught wind bad and went into the ground and I fouled that one on purpose. So, uh, I am glad I took the second throw conservatively but not over conservative. Because the discus had been going pretty bad for me, but I got a good throw off. Something that wasn't going to move me up but it wasn't going to move me down either. So it was more like get rid of this event and move on to the next one. But uh, nobody threw real well to pull away which really helped me. I even beat a couple of the guys who were in the running with me because they weren't very good discus throwers. It was an event that just came and went. There was nothing memorable about it.
- I: How important was being consistent from one event to the next for you?
- R: It was the most important thing. If you start performing high in one area and low in another area it will tear you apart mentally.

Consistency is something that all decathletes want, especially in those events where you can foul out. Let's say the pole vault is the number one concern for all decathletes because you know if you can be consistent there because you have done three fourths of the meet and if you no-height you have lost the meet no matter where you are. The high jump is similar to the pole vault and you can foul out there easily as well. It isn't quite as technical, but you can definitely foul out. The discus can be one where you can foul out of three times. So you look for consistency when you step in the ring. The shot put also. The running events are different. You want to be consistent, but you aren't going to foul out. You can always finish the race. It might not be the best time, but the pressure isn't there to not foul out or this could be the last event in this decathlon. Yeah consistency plays a major part and I think that is why we practice at being at a consistent level and then when we get into the meet we want to be above that consistent level. Consistency has always been good for me and that has helped me stay in the decathlon. I am not very erratic. My events are all pretty much even. Not all decathletes are like that and they are up and down. That throws you off mentally because you are thinking what if I had done this or done that. If you can stay at a consistent level you aren't surprising yourself one way or the other.

I: You were able to be consistent on that day?

R: Right, that day was average or above average. There was nothing I was getting real excited about and nothing was really depressing me. I think that is why I had a really good meet there. That wasn't the best meet I have ever had point wise.

I: That is interesting.

R: The best meet point wise, everything was up.

I: That wasn't your most meaningful performance though?

R: No, because everyone was doing really well that meet. That was the meet where we set an American record where we had eight Americans score over 8000. I was having a great meet but it didn't seem that great because everyone else was having a great meet. It was just perfect conditions. Perfect day and everybody was ready. You did your best, but everyone else did their best so your best didn't seem that great. It was great for scoring, but you wish you could do it on that day and they could have done it another day. I think that a lot of people that you interview will say the same thing about that meet.

I: Oh really.

R: Yeah, that meet was a highlight for me because it was my highest score and I still place fairly well. I think I place fifth in that meet, but everyone did so well. Since I placed fifth it isn't my most memorable performance. It is a shame because you would like for your highest score to be your most memorable performance. It didn't turn out that way. It isn't even my second most memorable. The second one would be the day I broke 8000 points, because it was a 400 point PR. There I was scared out of my mind.

I: Talk a little about that.

R: OK, well it was my first year competing for _____ and it was a home meet. It was one I was using to qualify for the national meet. I needed 7,450 points to qualify and uh, the 100 went real well, the long jump went real well, the shot put went real well, the high

jump went fantastic and the 400 went real well. The hurdles went real well, the discus went fantastic, the pole vault went fantastic, the discus went fantastic and I got to the 1500 the coaches told me I could break 8000. I was like there is no way because I was a 7500 point decathlete. I thought about it, but I didn't want to start thinking about it because it might jinx it. I just wanted to keep doing my best and not think about the score. I think that really helped me that day to not think about score. I wasn't ready to score 8000 points yet. A 7500 point decathlete isn't ready to score 800 points. It shocked me and it shocked everyone I told about it as well.

I: So you felt if you thought about it you would be jinxed.

R: Yeah, most decathletes are superstitious because all of us do stupid things. We all do things our own little way but it is the same way each time. Like I take a little hop before I start the pole vault. Everyone asks me why I hop and I tell them that I did it once and it worked so I do it every time. I put my shoes on the same way each time, left then right and tie my left and then my right, always the same way no matter what. I never tie the left until I get the left one on.

I: It was that way on those two days at NCAA's as well?

R: Yeah, I have done it the same way every since I was sixteen years old. It is just the way I have always done and it and if you go and change something you have always done you are going to put yourself in a little different frame of mind. Plus it is the fastest way to do things because sometimes I have to run from one event to the next and barely have time to put the other shoes on before I step up to the line. I think we were very superstitious as a group.

I: In the NCAA meet in the 1500 there is something else I would like to touch on and that is when you said you wanted to make it last forever. Every step I got happier. I wasn't worried about the other guys, I just wanted to make it last forever. Can you talk about what that experience of being in that little window of time was like for you?

R: I remember, I remember it so well. The last 100 meters I kept saying to myself and I think that is why it seemed like it took so long because I know I kept saying to myself I am going to be NCAA champion at least 200 times. I was using it as a tool to drive me on, to keep driving harder. I remember the crowd was cheering and I was excited about that. I just kept saying I am going to be NCAA champion, I am going to be NCAA champion, I am going to be NCAA champion. I just kept saying it over and over almost with every step and it was a great feeling.

I: You said earlier that it was in slow motion.

R: Yeah, it wasn't like it was slow motion really it just seems like I remember every hundredth second of it. Lets say that it took 15 seconds for me to run the last 100 meters. I am sure it was faster than that because I was running my heart out. I remember every hundredth second in there. Whereas when you are normally going through life you remember each second. I remember every movement and I can still see that I was running erratic and every time I got my leg up and put it down in front of me I was surprised.

I: How did you experience your body during that time?

- R: I don't know it kept going forward because of momentum I guess. I remember picking my leg up each time and putting it down in front of me. And uh, I can remember seeing the finish line and I can remember seeing my training partner finishing first. I remember the guy right in front of me and I was kind of using him to help keep myself straight. I couldn't really see straight because my eyes weren't focused. So I was running off of him and he was in bad shape because he went out really fast and he was dying. He thought he was going to make up a few places. He was really dying and I caught him about 2 meters before the finish line. Um, but I remember I couldn't see very well, but I hear well. I could hear the crowd cheering, um my training partner beat me by 13 seconds and he had turned around. He was in great physical shape and he didn't look like he had done anything. He turned around and I could hear him cheering for me. I thought that was strange because he was so far away. He was cheering very loud and he was the kind of guy who just really enjoyed competing in the decathlon. He never won any major meets, but he had a good time and he was a good athlete. I told him once before that he worried too much about having a good time and made it a social function. When his career was over he agreed with me and said he was too busy cheering for my girl friend throwing the shot or other girls. He was always cheering for girls. He would also cheer for the other guys in the decathlon. Like you waste energy cheering, you should just go sit down and rest and forget about what was going on. Anyway, I can remember finishing the race and I wish there was a tape for me to break. You don't need one because you know where the finish line is. I felt like that was missing from the dream. I guess when I dreamed about the 1500 I should have realized there wouldn't have been a tape for me to break. But, I remember that very well and a couple of trainers tried to pick me up after I fell over and help me walk. My mouth was real dry. Your mouth is always dry after the 1500. It is mostly from the stress and you have been out there for two days you can't ever drink enough. I just wanted to get my shoes off because my feet were hot and my calves were really tight. It doesn't really help much but you do feel somewhat better after you get your shoes off. Then I just tried to walk around after I laid down for about an hour. The trainers gave up on trying to move me.
- I: You told your training partner that he should conserve his energy and you also mentioned something about conserving energy yourself. Can you talk a little about conserving energy those two days?
- R: It was very important to me and it is important for all decathletes. I never really realized it but something I learned from my most recent training partner this last summer was that we are all aware of conserving energy. I remember walking up a flight of stairs the day before the meet and my partner was behind me. I was walking up the stairs and taking two stairs at a time. He watched me and said, "Oh two stairs is the way to go huh?" And I just looked at him and we were both thinking the same thing. He was thinking that one step which meant less height was going to conserve energy. Decathletes don't walk up stairs they always bounce jump up them. It helps to conserve energy. We do things all of the time to conserve energy, like not standing on our feet for too long. Bruce Jenner didn't go to the opening ceremonies at the '76 Olympics because he wanted to save energy. It was smart

because it worked for him. A lot of people wouldn't want to miss the opening ceremonies for anything. I remember at the Goodwill Games we had to march around the field and a lot of the guys didn't want to do it. So we just sat down in the middle of the field and I didn't care what people said about us. We were just trying to conserve energy. I can also remember in the Goodwill Games we were given bottles of Gatorade to give to the crowd and we were throwing them up into the stands on the first level. One guy started throwing up to the second level and I threw about twenty bottles up there. I can remember a couple of the guys saying that they shouldn't have been throwing them because they might have thrown their arm out before the competition. We are all conscious of saving energy.

I: You were able to accomplish that on those two days at NCAA's?

R: Oh yeah, I would put my things in strategic locations so I never had to walk all the way across the field. Even though I ran three quarters of a mile before my first event I wasn't wasting energy. That is something that I needed to do to get warm. After that, I just want to relax and especially when it is hot we will run for the shade and hide. We are all conscious of getting lots of fluids and we eat whenever we can during the day.

I: I would like to go way back in our conversation and ask you about something. I was wondering what your experience was like that day when you stepped up to the line or once you stepped in the ring right before you perform?

R: What worked best for me was that I tried to get my focus. A lot of decathletes will say that they will get into the ring and they just blank out, they don't remember anything. I can remember that happening to me a couple of times in the shot put. I would get into the ring and my mind would go blank. I would have to think about what I was supposed to do. I would think oh yeah I am supposed to turn in a circle and throw this thing. But it is a scary thing when you are in there and people are watching you and you want to do well and therefore you want to do it right. Usually when you blank out it is because you have so many things on your mind that you are trying to concentrate on, especially the technical events like the shot or the pole vault. You will just be there with so many things on your mind that you can't even think about the first thing or any of them for that matter. What I try to do is get focused before I get in the ring and I will walk in just like it is a practice competition throw.

I: Did you tell yourself this when you were competing on those two days?

R: Um, I tried to use the fact that it is competition to lift my spirits and get a better performance and I walk in and try to get the same feel I would have in practice. I think I did it pretty well. I was nervous, but I just got in there and did what I had rehearsed a thousand times.

I: So when you got in there if you were thinking about several things it would hurt you?

R: It would hurt me, so I tried as I always do to focus on one or possibly two things if they are far enough apart in the sequence of the event. Like in the shot put I think about something right in the beginning and something at the very end. If the two things are too close together it will make you mess up. But yeah, focusing on each individual event is important especially since we

have ten different events. So, what I have done as a decathlete is think of myself as a 100 meter runner then a long jumper and so on down the line. I don't think of myself as a decathlete doing the high jump or the long jump and I think we are all pretty much like that where we are so into the one event we are doing that we make ourselves into that rather than just playing with that. Some decathletes have a problem because they think of themselves as a decathlete therefore I am not a great high jumper or pole vaulter. Whereas someone asks me and I am a decathlete and a high jumper. It gives you a better feel for that event. If you say you are a decathlete instead of a high jumper it is almost like you are cheating that event. It is almost like you put so much work into the event you should be proud of it and say I work at this event and I will do well. It is almost like you are intimidated by the event and those decathletes who say they are not going to jump or run well in a certain event because they are decathletes first, they usually do poorly.

I: So while you were in the high jump that is the only event you were worried about.

R: Right, once in a while I will think in the high jump if I jump well I can run slower in the 400. All of us do that and the coaches hate that because they think we are going to go out and really run a slow race. But, what you do is jump really high and think to yourself that you have a great score going and now if I run well I will have a great score. But, so you always try to use things where you are. You are never high jumping and thinking I get a fast start in the 400 because that would be negative. We also use negativism to our advantage as well. Like saying if I jump high here, I can run slow there. But, when the time comes, hopefully you can run fast. It is down the road and hopefully you can change that train of thought. I know I do that. I don't know about the other guys. I am sure they do because I have heard them talk about it. If I have a bad event I try to forget about it, not really forget about it but I try to use it to help me do better in the next event. A lot of athletes try to stay away from it completely and their coaches say stay away from it completely. I think that is negative or bad to just completely forget about it. I think that I had a bad event and I can go out and make up for it. A lot of people tell you to not do that because if you think you have to make it up it will get you in trouble. Not me, I try to use it to motivate me.

I: So you are acknowledging the fact that you had a bad event and you are going to make it up.

R: I am not trying to ignore it and I am not trying to dwell on it either. A lot of athletes try to ignore it and I think that is bad. If they concentrate on it and they have another bad event it is just going to multiply. I have seen guys go down hill at a rate I couldn't believe. There are some who can have a few bad events and just forget about and they become an athlete again and start doing well again. I think athletes would be better off if they would do that.

I: I have probably asked this, but I want to make sure I get it. On those two days at the NCAA meet, were you able to use bad events to help you and move on.

R: Yeah, I used it to my advantage. I think that really helped me. I was able to even use negative thoughts to help me to perform

better. I would say I had a bad event and I could do better the next one. It motivated me. I look at it like I might not have had the good long jump without the bad 100 meters. I think that helped me stay more level across the other events. I would rather have two pretty good events than a poor one and a real good one. Decathlon is so individual because it is so long and everyone trains so hard for it and differently. It all looks the same on the outside.

I: Do you have anything else you have to add about your experience during those two days.

R: No, uh the decathlon is a rewarding event because there are so many areas you can improve in. If you train hard for it you will improve somewhere and you will look at it after the year is over and say you might not have had a great year in every meet, but you did improve and you can build on that. Once it is over and you can't do anything about it all you can do is look for the positive. And, there is always something positive because you had 10 events to have one thing go right. You just look back if you didn't have a good meet at all and say you had a good 100 meters and lets build on that. That is what you key on.

VITA

Gregory Alan Dale was born in San Antonio, Texas on December 28, 1961. He attended elementary school in Troy, Texas and middle school in Chistochina, Alaska. After moving back to Texas, Greg graduated from Troy High School in 1980. He received his undergraduate degree in Education from Stephen F. Austin State University in December, 1985. The following September, Greg entered Columbia University Teachers College in New York City and received the degree of Master of Arts in Physical Education in August, 1987.

From April, 1986 to June, 1990, Greg was employed by The Buckley School in New York City where he taught Science at the lower school level, all level Physical Education, and coached upper school football, basketball, and baseball. He returned to Texas in the fall of 1990 and taught Texas History one year at Anson Jones Middle School in San Antonio. During this time he also coached football, basketball, and track and field.

In August, 1991, Greg entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville as a doctoral student in Sport Psychology. Since January, 1992 he has been employed with the Men's Athletic Department at The University of Tennessee as a graduate assistant in the area of mental training. He will receive the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major emphasis in Sport Psychology in August, 1994.