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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Andrea J. Becker entitled "It's Not What They Do, It's How They Do It: Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching." I have examined the final electronic 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.

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IT'S NOT WHAT THEY DO, IT'S HOW THEY DO IT:

ATHLETE EXPERIENCES OF GREAT COACHING

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

Andrea J. Becker
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DEDICATION

To the two greatest coaches I’ve had in my life, my mom and dad...

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There are several individuals that I would like to acknowledge not only for their contributions to this dissertation, but also for their positive impact on my graduate school experience. To me, the qualities that make certain coaches great are many of the same qualities that my committee members embodied while guiding me through the process. First, I would like to thank my chair Dr. Craig Wrisberg for always being there. He has an open door policy and his door is literally open five days a week no matter the time. Dr. Wrisberg genuinely cares. He guided me and supported me, but most importantly he believed in me. For this, I will always be grateful. Dr. Wrisberg is more than just a professor. He is a true academic, a great person, and a lifelong friend.

Early in the dissertation process, my focus was on understanding the factors that underlie coaching effectiveness. However, Dr. Susan Speraw reminded me of my passion for understanding greatness. She asked me to think about past professors that were effective. She then asked me to think about past professors that were great. I quickly realized the difference between the two and in this moment, the focus of this dissertation shifted from the study of effective coaching to the study of great coaching. Dr. Speraw not only reminded me of my passion for studying greatness, but throughout the process, she pushed me and inspired me to achieve it. As a professor, Dr. Speraw is not only effective, but to me she will always be great.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of sport, a select number of individuals have emerged from their peers as superior coaches. We have come to know these individuals as the coaching greats: Vince Lombardi of the Green Bay Packers, Pat Summitt of the Tennessee Lady Volunteers, and John Wooden of the UCLA Bruins to name a few. The context of sport lends itself to the study of coaching greatness; however, no studies have directly explored this phenomenon. More often than not, society identifies coaches as "great" based on two criteria: win/loss records and public attention that is garnered through the media. This narrow definition limits the study of coaching greatness in two ways. First, the media focuses its coverage on high visibility sports and on coaches that work at higher levels of competition. Second, a winning record may not necessarily mean that a coach is great. As a result, we cannot rely on external resources (i.e., win/loss records and the media) to define greatness or to gain a thorough understanding of the factors that underlie great coaching. To truly explore this phenomenon, we must examine coaches from a variety of sports and competitive levels. If coaches are not winning championships or getting media attention, perhaps the only way to accurately determine their greatness is through the athletes that play for them. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to explore athlete experiences of great coaching. This was achieved by conducting a total of 18 in-depth phenomenological interviews with elite level athletes (9 female; 9 male) representing a variety of sports (i.e., baseball, basketball, football, soccer, softball, volleyball, and water polo). Participants ranged in age from 22 to 42 years. All interview transcripts were typed verbatim. Analyses of the transcripts revealed a total of 1,553 meaning units that were further grouped into sub-themes and general themes. This led to the development of a final thematic structure revealing six major dimensions that characterized these athletes' experiences of great coaching: *Coach Attributes, The Environment, Relationships, The System, Coaching Actions,* and *Influences.*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The importance of coaching is self-evident. Coaches are responsible for developing athletes' mental, physical, technical, and tactical abilities, but they are also expected to win. Meeting these expectations is a challenging task for all coaches and while some achieve positive results, others fail to get the best out of their athletes and teams. Throughout the history of sport, a select number of individuals have emerged from their peers as superior coaches. We have come to know these individuals as the coaching greats: Vince Lombardi of the Green Bay Packers, Pat Summitt of the Tennessee Lady Volunteers, and John Wooden of the UCLA Bruins to name a few. The context of sport lends itself to the study of coaching greatness; however, no studies have directly explored this phenomenon. In addition, a clear definition of coaching greatness does not exist.

More often than not, society identifies coaches as "great" based on two criteria: win/loss records and public attention that is garnered through the media. This narrow definition limits the study of coaching greatness in two ways. First, the media focuses its coverage on high visibility sports and on coaches participating at higher levels of competition. If you ask any one individual to make a list of coaching greats, three primary sports will likely be represented: football, basketball, and baseball. Furthermore, it is likely that the list will only include collegiate and professional level coaches. Therefore, coaching greatness is limited to the handful of coaches that are known to many. This excludes the everyday coaching greats whose names and faces remain

unknown to the public: those who coach less popular sports (e.g., wrestling, volleyball, rowing) or at lower competitive levels (e.g., youth, club, or small college).

In collegiate sport for example, there are three NCAA Divisions that differ according to the size of universities and the number of available scholarships. Although the caliber of talent and degree of competitiveness is higher at the Division I level, coaches at all levels are faced with a similar task. They must use the athletes and resources that they have to be successful against teams with comparable resources. While many Division I coaches are publicly honored for their successes, the accomplishments of coaches at the Division II and III levels often go unnoticed. John Gagliardi has coached football at the Division III level for the past 58 years. During his time as the head coach at Saint John's University, his teams have accumulated the greatest number of wins (430) and the highest win percentage (.788) in collegiate football history. While these numbers exceed those of more popular Division I coaches like Bobby Bowden and Joe Paterno, Gagliardi has not received the same amount of public attention and is therefore not commonly identified by society as one of the coaching greats.

Another drawback to using public attention as a primary resource for identifying greatness is that the media tends to highlight certain coaches. Knute Rockne, for example, is a coach whose name has become synonymous with greatness. Howard Jones, on the other hand, is a coach whose name remains unknown to many. Both of these individuals were collegiate football coaches during the early part of the twentieth century. Rockne was the head coach at Notre Dame (1918-1930), while Jones was the head coach at both the University of Iowa (1916-1923) and the University of Southern California (1925-1940). With six national championships, five undefeated seasons, and only 12 losses over

the course of 13 years, Rockne's success is undeniable. However, Jones' accomplishments are also noteworthy. In 1921, the Hawkeyes went undefeated and even snapped Notre Dame's 20-game win streak (the longest of Rockne's career). During his 16 seasons at the helm of USC, Jones' teams won seven conference championships, four national titles, and five Rose Bowls. In 1951, both Jones and Rockne were inducted into the National Football Hall of Fame. So why do we know so much more about Rockne than Jones?

Over the course of the twentieth century, Rockne made the cover of time magazine (1927), had Studebaker automobiles manufactured in his name (1932), was featured on a U.S. postal stamp (1988), and was named by ESPN as one of the greatest coaches of the all time (1999). Additionally, there is a monument of Rockne in Voss, Norway (his birthplace) and he even has a town named after him in Texas. There are also numerous books and videos that highlight his life and career as a football coach. Although the USC practice field is named after Howard Jones, he did not receive the public attention that Rockne did. Therefore, it appears that relying on the media as a primary resource for identifying great coaches would eliminate individuals like Howard Jones. To truly explore the phenomenon of coaching greatness, we must examine coaches from a variety of sports and competitive levels. If coaches are not publicly identified in the media, perhaps the only way to accurately determine their greatness is through the athletes who play for them.

The second limitation to defining of coaching greatness by wins and losses is that a winning record may not necessarily mean that a coach is great. Take Bob Knight for example. This highly popular Division I basketball coach is known for his unruly

behaviors (i.e., throwing chairs across the floor during games, physically assaulting players and personnel, making outrageous remarks during on-site interviews). However, he is also known for winning. In 41 seasons as a head basketball coach, Knight's teams have accumulated 876 wins, 11 conference championships, and three national titles. Among his laundry list of accomplishments, Knight has also been honored as National Coach of the Year on four occasions. While it may be debated whether Bob Knight is a great coach, there is no doubt that he is effective. He has the ability to teach and inspire his athletes to perform up to their potential and come together in pursuit of common goals. Perhaps it is the manner in which coaches accomplish this task that separates effective coaching from great coaching. However, once again, it appears that the only way to truly know is to ask the athletes themselves.

As previously mentioned, coaching greatness is a topic that has not been directly addressed within the sport psychology literature. To date, the majority of research has focused on the factors associated with effective coaching. According to Horn (2002), effective coaching is most commonly defined as:

> ...that which results in either successful performance outcomes (measured in terms of either win-loss percentages or degree of self-perceived performance abilities) or positive psychological responses on the part of the athletes (e.g., high perceived ability, high self-esteem, an intrinsic motivational orientation, high level of sport enjoyment). (p. 309)

Most studies have examined effectiveness in relationship to coaching behaviors (e.g., Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999; Claxton, 1988; Lacy & Goldston, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). In addition, researchers have relied primarily on quantitative

instruments and observational methods to achieve this task (e.g., Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Lacy & Darst, 1985; Rushall & Wiznuk, 1985). While previous research offers a wealth of valuable information regarding the factors associated with effective coaching, there are two significant reasons why the findings are limited. First, much of the instrumentation used to examine coaching (e.g., Leadership Scale for Sports) was developed according to knowledge extracted from research in industrial and organizational psychology (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). Therefore, the scope of coaching research has been restricted to information obtained from measures that were created according to predetermined assumptions and existing knowledge from outside of sport.

Second, the majority of research has examined observable phenomena (i.e., coaching behaviors) in relation to measurable outcomes (i.e., athletes' self-perceptions and performance). In fact, Valle and colleagues (1989) have identified behaviorism as the focal point of psychological inquiry. While this approach conforms to the assumptions of traditional scientific methods (i.e., phenomena must be observable, measurable, and replicable), it neglects to address those aspects of psychology that are unobservable. In recent decades, researchers have expanded the definition of psychology to include the study of both human *behavior* and *experience* (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Because previous research in sport has focused on the observable, only a handful of studies have addressed the topic of coaching from an experiential perspective (e.g., De Marco, Mancini, & West, 1997; Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett,1999; Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). To date, only one study has directly examined athletes' experiences of being coached (Johnson, 2001). No research has explored athletes' experiences of great coaching. Thus, the majority of research on

coaching has focused on the behavioral and the ordinary rather than the experiential and the extraordinary. This gap in the sport psychology literature can be addressed by examining the experiences of those most affected by coaches on a daily basis, the athletes themselves.

Great coaching is more than just winning games and garnering public attention. Coaches influence athletes' skills and performance outcomes, but they also influence people and their lives both on and off the playing field. Everything that a coach does or accomplishes is through the play and performance of athletes. As a result, we cannot rely on external resources (i.e., win records and the media) to define greatness or to gain a thorough understanding of the factors that underlie great coaching. The key eyewitnesses are truly the athletes.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of coaching greatness from the perspective of the athletes themselves. More specifically, in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted to explore athlete experiences of great coaching.

Significance

This study may not reveal a specific formula for great coaching, but it should expand on our current knowledge and provide us with benchmarks and/or strategies that have the potential to enhance the quality of coaching education. Coaches spend a considerable amount of time working with athletes and typically develop their craft by

observing and collaborating with other coaches. While coaches can learn a lot from one another, they can only assume how their behaviors, interactions, and training techniques actually influence athletes. By exploring athlete experiences of coaching greatness, this study will provide coaches with a perspective that cannot be achieved through conversations with or the study of other coaches. As a result, coaches can develop their abilities based on information obtained from the athletes that play for them.

Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, three assumptions were identified. First, it was assumed that athlete participants would be able to recall at least one experience of great coaching. Second, participants had the ability to reflect and provide accurate, honest, and open accounts of their experiences. Finally, it was assumed that the essence of great coaching transcends sports and competitive levels.

Limitations

The outcome of this study is limited for three reasons. First, coaching greatness was solely defined by the athletes' perceptions of whether or not they had a great coach. A more comprehensive measurement would be to identify successful coaches that are also considered great by their athletes. Second, it is possible that athletes were not completely honest and/or accurate when recalling and discussing their experiences. Their memories of being coached may have been more positive or negative than their actual experiences. Third, the time lapse between athlete interviews and actual experiences of great coaching may have impacted the accuracy of their recollections.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The context of sport lends itself to the study of coaching greatness; however, no studies have directly explored this phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to examine athlete experiences of great coaching. To date, a clear definition of coaching greatness does not exist. In an attempt to better understand the factors associated with effective coaching, researchers have examined coaches from a variety of angles. In this review, existing research on the following topics is discussed: (a) coaching behaviors (b) their influence on athletes' self-perceptions and performance (c) coaches' perceptions of their own behaviors (d) and coaching education.

Coaching Behaviors

Observational methods represent one approach to understanding the behavioral components associated with effective coaching. Two of the most commonly used observational instruments are the Coaching Behavior Assessment System (CBAS; Smith, Smoll, & Hunt, 1977) and the Arizona State University Observation Instrument (ASUOI; Lacy & Darst, 1984). These instruments consist of various categories, which represent the types of behaviors coaches exhibit in practice and game environments. Because effective coaching is often equated with performance outcomes (i.e., win/loss percentages), many observational studies have focused on the practice behaviors of successful coaches.

General Feedback Patterns

Research suggests that successful coaches offer greater amounts of overall feedback to athletes than do less successful coaches (Markland & Martinek, 1988). Additionally, successful coaches provide training and instruction more often than any other coaching behavior (Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999; Claxton, 1988; Lacy & Darst, 1985; Segrave & Ciancio, 1990; Serpa, Pataco, & Santos, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). This is particularly important considering that training and instruction is athletes' most preferred type of feedback (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995; Serpa, et al., 1991; Terry & Howe, 1984). In fact, Olympic athletes identified their coaches' informational feedback as one of the most significant factors that helped them improve the various skills and characteristics they needed for achieving success (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 1999). Therefore, it is not surprising that Lacy and Darst (1985) considered training and instruction to be a "pre-requisite to effective coaching" (p. 269).

The second and third most frequent practice behaviors that successful coaches exhibit are hustle and praise (Bloom, et al., 1999; Lacy & Goldston, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). However, these behaviors may vary depending on the level of competition. Collegiate coaches tend to emphasize hustle, while youth sport coaches emphasize praise and encouragement (Bloom, et al., 1999; Lacy & Goldston, 1990; Segrave & Ciancio, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976; Wandzilak, Ansorge, & Potter, 1988). Providing greater amounts of praise and encouragement may be necessary in situations where motivation is a key element to participation and/or effort (Segrave & Ciancio, 1990). Based on these findings, it appears that general feedback patterns are influenced by situational and/or contextual factors.

Individual Feedback Patterns

Expectancy theorists suggest that feedback patterns are also influenced by coaches' expectations for athlete performance (Horn, Lox, & Labrador 2001; Martinek, 1981; Solomon, 2001). According to expectancy theory, coaches establish their expectations by evaluating athletes' personal (i.e., height, weight), performance (i.e., speed, agility), and psychological (i.e., confidence, anxiety) abilities. Research reveals that more and less successful coaches prioritize similar characteristics when evaluating athletes (Becker & Solomon, 2005). Of all the abilities athletes possess, coaches tend to place a higher degree of importance on psychological characteristics (Becker & Solomon, 2005; Solomon, 2001). In a recent study of NCAA Division I basketball coaches, the most valued characteristics were athletes' *work ethic, receptivity to coaching, willingness to learn, love of sport, and willingness to listen* (Becker & Solomon, 2005). While all coaches appear to rely on similar characteristics to establish performance expectations, distinguishing between good and great coaches may differ with respect to how they use this information.

Research examining expectancy effects at youth, high school, and elite levels of competition suggests that many coaches provide differential feedback according to their perceptions of athlete abilities (Lacy & Martin, 1994; Markland & Martinek, 1988; Sinclair & Vealey, 1989; Solomon, DiMarco, Ohlson, & Reese, 1998; Solomon, Striegel, Eliot, Heon, Maas, & Wayda, 1996; Solomon, Wiegardt, Yusuf, Kosmitzki, Williams, Stevens, et al., 1996). Athletes viewed as having a greater potential for success (high expectancy), such as the starters, have been found to receive more feedback than those considered to have less potential, such as the non-starters (low expectancy) (Markland &

Martinek, 1988; Rejeski, Darracott, & Hutslar, 1979; Solomon, Striegel, et al., 1996). In addition, the quality of feedback provided to high expectancy athletes is more evaluative, positive, and performance specific when compared to that given to low expectancy athletes (Sinclair & Vealey, 1989; Solomon, DiMarco et al., 1998). Using performance expectations to provide the better skilled athletes with a greater quantity and quality of feedback is problematic for two reasons.

One, coaches' evaluations of athlete characteristics are not always accurate indicators of how athletes will actually perform. In a study of high school volleyball players, coaches were asked to evaluate their athletes' potential based on several performance characteristics (Marey, Boleach, Mayhew, & McDole, 1991). While these coaches believed that athletes who jumped higher, moved quicker, and were more experienced had a greater potential for success, results demonstrated no correlation between coach ratings of potential and actual athlete performance (Marey, et al., 1991).

Two, athletes perceived as low expectancy are not afforded the same opportunities to improve their skills as those perceived as high expectancy. This is especially discouraging in light of research that suggests that coaches are not likely to change their perceptions of athlete abilities, even when athletes perform above the coach's expectations (Solomon, Golden, Ciapponi, & Martin, 1998; Solomon & Kosmitzki, 1996). Therefore, coaches continue to exhibit patterns of feedback that hinder the improvement and performance of low expectancy athletes.

Fortunately, not all coaches allow their performance expectations to influence the way they treat athletes. This was demonstrated in a recent study that examined Pat Summitt's practice behaviors in relation to her perceptions of athlete ability (Becker &

Wrisberg, in progress). During the 2004-05 basketball season, Summitt was asked to evaluate her players' abilities. This information was used to identify high and low expectancy players. Over the course of the season, six practice sessions were video recorded and Summitt's feedback patterns were analyzed. The results revealed no differences in the quantity or quality of feedback that she provided to high and low expectancy players (Becker & Wrisberg, in progress). In contrast to previous research, Summitt's behaviors did not appear to be influenced by her expectations of players' abilities. While she did not view her players as equally talented, she gave feedback indicating that they were equally valued.

Rather than provide only the best athletes with feedback, highly successful coaches, like Pat Summitt, have been found to provide fair amounts of treatment to all of their athletes (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004; Nater & Gallimore, 2006; Segrave & Ciancio, 1990). Research on coaching effectiveness suggests that feedback does not have to be equal, but it needs to be equitable (Becker & Solomon, 2005; Solomon, Striegel, et al., 1996). Successful youth football coach, Beau Kilmer, accomplished this by directing the same amount of effort toward teaching complex techniques to his experienced athletes as he did teaching basic skills to his less experienced athletes (Segrave & Ciancio, 1990).

Similarly, John Wooden provided his players with feedback that always had a specific purpose. (Nater & Gallimore, 2006; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). For example, knowing that his starters would receive attention and reinforcement from outside sources (i.e., media, fans), Wooden made a conscious effort to give more praise to his reserve players (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004). Not only did this reinforce the effort that the reserves gave in practice, but it also showed that their contributions to the team were equally

appreciated. While this is only one example of Wooden's coaching behavior, it suggests that he clearly understood the impact of his behaviors and the importance of providing players with individualized treatment. "You can't work with them the same way. You've got to study and analyze each individual and find out what makes them tick and how you can get them under control" (Gallimore & Tharp, p. 126). Some have suggested that the key to Wooden's effectiveness was "the product of extensive, detailed, and daily planning based on continuous evaluation of individual and team development and performance" (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004, p. 124). Evaluating athletes is a natural occurrence in sport. While many coaches use this information to provide the best athletes with a greater quantity and quality of feedback, Wooden used this information to accommodate the needs of all his players.

Individualized Treatment

The importance of providing athletes with individualized treatment has emerged as a common theme within the coaching literature (Gould, et al., 1999; Gould, Hodge, Peterson, & Petlichkoff, 1987). When interviewed about the psychology of coaching, successful swim coach Doc Councilman emphasized the importance of individualizing treatment when practicing, preparing for competition, providing feedback, and helping athletes set their goals (Kimiecik & Gould, 1987). This finding was reinforced in a more recent study that examined collegiate coaches' perceptions of what they did to facilitate the progress of athletes who made significant improvements over the course of their collegiate careers (Giacobbi, Whitney, Roper, & Butryn, 2002). More specifically, these coaches believed they facilitated improvement by making an attempt to understand their

athletes, relate to the athletes on a personal level, and adjust their coaching behaviors and feedback to accommodate individual needs (Giacobbi, et al., 2002). In order to effectively provide individualized feedback, coaches must truly know their athletes: their motivations, their goals, their learning styles, their reactions, their character, and their lives outside of sport (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002; Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Lanning, 1979).

Coach-Athlete Relations

Coaches who display a genuine interest in their players, not only as athletes, but also as individuals, establish strong relationships that often extend beyond the sport environment (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 1999; Lanning, 1979; Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996). When considering the amount of time that coaches and athletes spend together, it is not surprising that many athletes view their coaches as "second parents" (Gould, et al., 1999; Lidor & Lavyan, 2002). The significance of developing good coach-athlete relationships was highlighted in a study that traced the development of elite and non-elite junior tennis players (Carlson, 1988). While the elite level players discussed how they had developed strong and enduring relationships with their coaches, this rarely occurred for the non-elite players.

Some of the factors that characterize good coach-athlete relationships include "mutual trust, confidence in each other's abilities, good communication (especially good listening skills) and a sense of collaboration or working together" (Gould, et al., 1999, p. 2). Furthermore, athletes tend to view their coaches more positively when they exhibit behaviors that demonstrate they are knowledgeable, trustworthy, passionate, dedicated,

disciplined, enthusiastic, organized, positive, and caring (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould, et al., 2002; Gould, et al., 1999). Research conducted on coaches' behaviors and interactions with athletes has enhanced our knowledge of the factors associated with effective coaching. Understanding this aspect of coaching is important because everything that coaches say and do influences athlete performance, both directly and indirectly.

Influence of Coaching Behaviors on Athlete Self-Perceptions

Behaviors that indirectly affect performance are those that influence athletes' self-perceptions (i.e., satisfaction, competence, anxiety). The Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) is perhaps the most widely used instrument in this line of research. The LSS measures athlete preferences and perceptions of coaching behaviors on five leader dimensions: training and instruction, social support, positive feedback, democratic behavior, and autocratic behavior (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978, 1980). The majority of research in this area has focused on the relationship between coaching behaviors and athletes' perceptions of satisfaction and competence.

Satisfaction

The coaching dimensions of training and instruction, positive feedback, and social support appear to have the largest impact on athletes' satisfaction (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995; Schliesman, 1987; Summers, 1991; Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986). Research suggests that satisfaction is optimized when athlete preferences are congruent with their perceptions of actual coaching behaviors (Chelladurai, 1984; Riemer & Chelladurai,

1995; Schliesman, 1987). Furthermore, higher levels of satisfaction are associated with greater frequencies of training and instruction, social support, positive feedback, and more democratic decision-making (Allen & Howe, 1998; Black & Weiss, 1992; Chelladurai, 1984; Dwyer & Fisher, 1990; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995; Schliesman, 1987).

Competence

Research suggests that coaching behaviors also influence athletes' perceptions of competence (Allen & Howe, 1998; Horn, 1985). In fact, youth sport athletes have been found to rely more heavily on coach feedback as an indicator of ability, than on actual performance outcomes (Amorose & Smith, 2003; Amorose & Weiss, 1998). Higher levels of athlete competence are associated with more frequent amounts of praise and informational feedback, and less frequent amounts of criticism (Allen & Howe, 1998; Amorose & Weiss, 1998; Black & Weiss, 1992). However, the relationship between coach feedback and athlete competence is complex and may vary depending on situational and/or individual differences. For example, receiving encouragement and informational feedback following unsuccessful performances has been shown to be related to *higher* levels of competence for competitive swimmers (Black & Weiss, 1992), but *lower* levels of competence for adolescent field hockey players (Allen & Howe, 1998). Therefore, it appears that coaches must be aware of *how* their feedback influences athletes' feelings of competence.

Coaches' awareness of the impact of their feedback on athletes is particularly important because athlete confidence has been shown to facilitate actual performance

(Gould et al., 2002; Highlen & Bennett, 1979; Weinberg, Grove, & Jackson, 1992). Within the coaching literature, researchers have identified thirteen strategies that coaches use to enhance athlete confidence (Gould, Hodge, Peterson, & Giannini, 1989). Of these strategies, coaches consistently rate drilling and instruction, modeling confidence, encouraging positive self-talk, and providing rewarding feedback as some of the most effective (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, & Chung, 2002; Gould, Hodge, Peterson, & Giannini, 1989; Weinberg, et al., 1992; Weinberg & Jackson, 1990). Doc Councilman has suggested that confidence increases when athletes know that they have trained hard and believe in their training (Kimiecik & Gould, 1987). Olympic level athletes have been found to express more confidence when playing for coaches who stay calm under pressure, make fair decisions, and gain their athletes' trust (Gould et al., 2002; Gould et al., 1999).

Influence of Coaching Behaviors on Athlete Performance

While many studies provide evidence of the impact of coaching behaviors on athletes' self-perceptions, less is known about the influence of coaching behaviors on actual performance. The available research in this area suggests that athlete performance is more likely to improve if coaches focus on being positive, constructive, and concise when offering instruction and feedback (Bloom, et al., 1999; Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). In addition, higher levels of athlete performance are associated with coaching behaviors that include greater amounts of training and instruction, social support, positive feedback, and democratic decision-making (Garland & Barry, 1990; Westre & Weiss, 1991).

Athletes have also identified coaching behaviors that facilitated or hindered their performance at the Olympic games (Gould et al., 2002; Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001). Those who performed better emphasized the importance of having their coaches' trust, friendship, and feedback (Greenleaf et al., 2001). In addition, coaches were more effective when they helped athletes develop and execute good competition plans. In contrast, coaches who noticeably changed their behaviors in competition, provided inaccurate technical informational, performed inappropriately in times of crisis, and failed to monitor athletes' preparation negatively influenced athlete performance (Gould et al., 1999; Greenleaf, et al., 2001). Due to the significant impact that coaching behaviors have on athlete performance, coaches must be aware of themselves and the effects of their behaviors on athletes.

Coach Perceptions of Their Own Behaviors

Unfortunately, research suggests that coaches' are often unaware or inaccurate when evaluating their own behaviors (De Marco, Mancini, & West, 1997; Krane, Eklund, & McDermott, 1991; Wandzilak, et al., 1988). In one study, youth soccer coaches perceived themselves as exhibiting more encouragement and fewer instructional and organizational behaviors than were identified by trained observers (Wandzilak, et al., 1988). Additionally, coaches' ability to accurately recall their behaviors has been shown to decrease as the number of players on a team increases (Hansen & Gould, 1988). Athletes, on the other hand, appear to be more accurate when recalling their coaches' behaviors and feedback (Salminen, Liukkonen, & Telama, 1992; Solomon, Striegel, et al., 1996; Wandzilak, et al., 1988). Therefore, it is not surprising that studies often reveal

discrepancies between coach and athlete perceptions of coaching behaviors (Huddleston, Ahrabi-Fard, & Garvin, 1995; Kenow & Williams, 1992; Salminen, et al., 1992; Serpa, et al., 1991; Wandzilak, et al., 1988).

In most cases, coaches view themselves more positively than do their athletes (Anshel & Straub, 1991; Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996). For example, a group of Finnish coaches evaluated themselves as providing more training and instruction, social support, and positive feedback than their athletes perceived them providing (Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996; Salminen, et al., 1992). In another study, college basketball players found their coach's game mannerisms to exhibit higher stress than the coaches perceived (Kenow & Williams, 1992, 1999). Furthermore, athletes with greater tendencies to experience anxiety viewed the stress behaviors more negatively than athletes lower in anxiety. This finding is problematic considering that coaches are not always adept at detecting athletes' anxiety levels (Hanson & Gould, 1998). Based on these findings, it is possible that coaches *unknowingly* exhibit behaviors that negatively influence athletes' anxiety and subsequent performance.

Coaching Education

Fortunately, research suggests that coaches can improve their behaviors by engaging in self-evaluation, obtaining external feedback, and participating in coach education (De Marco, et al., 1997; Gould, Hodge, et al., 1987; Gould, Giannini, Krane, & Hodge, 1990; Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979). In an early experiment of coach effectiveness training (Smith, et al., 1979), a group of Little League Baseball coaches (responsible for 325 children) were divided into two groups: experimental and control.

Throughout the course of one season, the coaches in the experimental group attended workshops, engaged in reflective activities to increase their self-awareness, and received feedback on their coaching behaviors. At the end of the season, children's perceptions of and attitudes about themselves and their coaches were assessed. Children's evaluations of the trained coaches were more positive than those of the untrained coaches (Smith, et al., 1979). Additionally, the children who played for the trained coaches exhibited greater increases in self-esteem, liked their coaches better, and had more fun over the course of the season than did children who played for the untrained coaches. The behavioral techniques employed to increase the coaches' self-awareness were also successful in promoting more desirable coaching behaviors, such as positive reinforcement, technical instruction, and encouragement (Smith, et al., 1979).

Summary

A number of studies have examined various aspects of coaching to better understand what makes certain coaches more effective than others. Observation techniques and quantitative instruments are the two primary methods that have been used to gather information. To date, only one study has directly examined athlete experiences of being coached (Johnson, 2001). However, no studies have explored athlete experiences of great coaching. The goal of this research was to fill this gap in the literature. It was anticipated that the results of this study might serve to enhance the quality of coaching education and subsequently the experiences of future sport participants.

CHAPTER 3

Method

This study was designed to examine athlete experiences of great coaching from a qualitative perspective. Existential phenomenological methods were used to accomplish this task. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methodology, participants, procedures, and data analysis used in the study.

Methodology

While traditional scientific methods seek to understand aspects of human existence by way of objective measures that are observable, existential phenomenology exposes the unobservable by tapping into human experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). Existentialism is a philosophy that seeks to understand the basic elements or "givens" of human existence (Thomas & Pollio, 2002; Van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005; Yalom, 1980). While it originated with Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) in nineteenth-century Denmark, a number of distinguished philosophers including Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) have explored life issues (e.g., joy, anxiety, love, and despair) from an existential perspective (Gadamer, 1976; Thomas & Pollio, 2002; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Those who adopt this school of thought believe that human beings define themselves and their existence in the world (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Ultimately, existentialism is based on the premise that *existence precedes essence.* This suggests that an individual must exist before his or her life has meaning, and furthermore, that life's meaning is ultimately defined by the individual.

Due to the nature of this philosophy, nineteenth century existentialists found traditional scientific methods (which focus on observable and measurable phenomena) to be inadequate for truly understanding human consciousness and experience (Valle et al., 1989). As a result, philosophers turned to phenomenology, which was introduced by Edmund Husserl around the turn of the twentieth century (Schneider & May, 1995). This method of inquiry was considered to be "the only way of elevating philosophy to the status of a rigorous science" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 130). By combining existential thought with phenomenological methods, German Philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) created a psychological discipline that could "explicate the *essence*, *structure*, or *form* of both human experience and human behavior as revealed through essentially *descriptive* techniques including disciplined reflection (Valle, et al., 1989, p. 6). Due to the intangible nature of experience, an understanding of the essence of a phenomenon can only be achieved through dialogue. For the purposes of this study, athlete participants were asked to discuss their experiences of great coaching during in-depth phenomenological interviews.

Participants

The final sample of participants included 18 elite level athletes (9 female; 9 male) representing various sports (i.e., baseball, basketball, football, soccer, softball, volleyball, and water polo). Participants ranged in age from 22 to 42 years (M = 29*)*. A description of the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Description of Athlete Participants

Gender	Age	Race	Sport	Highest Level of Experience
Female	22	Caucasian	Soccer	USA National Team
Female	24	Caucasian	Volleyball	NCAA Division I
Female	25	Pacific Islander	Softball	NCAA Division I
Female	25	African American	Basketball	WNBA Professional
Female	25	Caucasian	Water Polo	NCAA Division I
Female	27	Caucasian	Basketball	NCAA Division I
Female	28	Asian	Soccer	Olympic Team
Female	28	Asian	Soccer	USA National Team
Female	35	Hispanic	Volleyball	NCAA Division I
Male	22	Caucasian	Baseball	Minor Leagues
Male	27	Caucasian	Baseball	NCAA Division I
Male	28	Caucasian	Volleyball	NCAA Division I
Male	28	Caucasian	Baseball	Minor Leagues
Male	32	Caucasian	Basketball	NCAA Division I
Male	35	Caucasian	Volleyball	NCAA Division I
Male	35	Caucasian	Soccer	NCAA Division I
Male	36	African American	Football	NFL Professional
Male	42	African American	Football	NFL Professional

Procedures

The procedures used in this study were based on Pollio and colleagues' (1997) recommended steps for conducting existential-phenomenological research. These include *Exploring Researcher Bias, Selection of Participants, Data Collection, Data Analysis*, and *Confirming Thematic Structure*. Each steps is discussed in following section.

Step 1 – Exploring Researcher Bias

One of the first steps in phenomenological research is the exploration of researcher biases. The goal of existential-phenomenology is to "attend to the phenomena of experience as they appear" (Idhe, 1986, p. 34). This requires the suspension of pre-existing beliefs and theories that limit the scope of possibilities by trying to explain rather than describe. For this reason, phenomenology is not focused on the "why," but seeks to discover the "what" of experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002; Valle, et al., 1989). Husserl referred to this process as eidetic *epoché* (Polkinghorne, 1989). "*Epoché* requires that looking precedes judgment and that judgment of what is 'real' or 'most real' be suspended until all the evidence (or at least sufficient evidence) is in" (Idhe, 1986, p. 36). Therefore, it is important for qualitative researchers to become aware of their presuppositions and biases prior to conducting their research. A bracketing interview is used to accomplish this task.

Bracketing Interview. For the purposes of this study, the primary researcher participated in a bracketing interview with an individual who had an extensive background and expertise in qualitative methods. During this interview, the

researcher discussed her own experiences and perceptions of great coaching. The goal was to increase her awareness of preconceptions so that she could avoid imposing them on the participants when conducting interviews or analyzing the data in this study. Some of the general assumptions that emerged from the bracketing interview were as follows. The researcher felt that the participants in this study were likely to discuss how their coaches exhibited behaviors that accommodated the individual needs of athletes. Great coaches were those that not only got to know their athletes as players, but also as people. In addition, they engaged in behaviors that demonstrated how much they cared for their athletes. Finally, athletes preferred coaches who focused on how to perform skills correctly, rather than on what was performed incorrectly. Acknowledging these presuppositions helped the primary researcher suspend her biases to more openly examine the phenomenon of great coaching from the experiences of the athlete participants.

Step 2 – Selection of Participants

The second step in phenomenological research is the selection of participants. Upon obtaining approval from the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board, the researcher sent a letter of invitation to participate in the study to former Division I, international, and/or professional level athletes from a variety of sports (Appendix A). The letter included a description of the purposes, procedures, and criteria for inclusion. Flyers were also distributed to individuals (e.g., coaches, former teammates, colleagues) who were personal contacts of the primary researcher (Appendix B).

For the purposes of this study, three criteria were considered for inclusion. First, athletes must have competed on a sport team at the Division I intercollegiate level or higher. This helped to ensure that athlete participants had an understanding of what it takes to succeed at a highly competitive level. Athletes who have reached such levels are more likely to have experienced a variety of coaches throughout the course of their careers. Second, athletes had to have experienced "great coaching" and recall at least one experience playing for a great coach. Third, athletes had to be willing and able to openly provide rich descriptions of their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Athletes who met these criteria and chose to participate were scheduled for an interview.

Step 3 – Data Collection

"The opening question in any phenomenological interview is worded to allow for a broad range of descriptive responses from each participant" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 32). According to Idhe (1986), "What is sought [by the researcher] is what is given; what is sought is what is immediate or present to the experiencer" (p. 33). The goal of phenomenological research is not to lead participants in certain directions, but to help participants elaborate on various aspects of their experiences (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Therefore, interviews are typically guided by unstructured open-ended questions (Polkinghorne, 1989). For the purposes of this study, athletes were asked to respond to the following question: "Can you talk about your experiences of great coaching?" Based on participant responses, subsequent questions were asked to clarify points, dissect metaphors, and/or obtain more examples of the phenomenon under investigation. To

ensure that nothing was overlooked, participants were also asked if they had anything else to share about their experiences before the interview was concluded.

Practice Interview. A practice interview was conducted with a former Division I basketball player (female, aged 24). The interview was used to determine whether the question was sufficient and to refine the researcher's interviewing skills. The interviewee provided the primary researcher with information regarding her interviewing skills. This resulting transcript was analyzed to determine whether the researcher maintained an unbiased approach throughout the interviewing process.

Participant Interviews. Interviews were conducted at either the participants' home or office. Due to logistical difficulties, four interviews were conducted by phone. The purpose of the phone interviews was to increase the diversity and depth of the participant sample. Regardless of the mode of communication, the main question and follow up probes remained consistent across interviews. Before beginning the interview, athlete participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the study and asked to give their consent by signing a consent form (Appendix C). Interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in length. At the end of each interview, demographic information was obtained (e.g., gender, age, sport, and level of experience) and participants were given a pseudonym to preserve their anonymity throughout the process. (A sample interview is provided in Appendix D).

Step 4 – Data Analysis

Once the interviewing process was completed, each interview was transcribed verbatim. This resulted in 220 single-spaced pages of data. At this point, the focus was shifted to the text. Existential phenomenology does not seek to infer causation, but rather to interpret the meaning of experience (Romanyshyn & Whalen, 1989; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). This requires researchers to continually relate parts of the text to the whole (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). To get a sense of the whole text, complete transcripts were read and recurring patterns and/or statements that stood out as significant were identified as meaning units (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Unlike traditional scientific methods, existential-phenomenology does not view individuals as objects in nature. Instead, there is an interrelatedness between people and the world. One does not have meaning without the other (Valle, et al., 1989). This relationship is most commonly depicted in perceptual exercises such as the popular "vase and faces" drawing (Idhe, 1986; Thomas & Pollio, 2002; Valle, et al., 1989). In this black and white drawing, a white vase is visible due to the existence of the surrounding black area; and a black silhouette of two faces is visible due to the existence of the white area. The "figure" that can be identified by looking at one area of the drawing emerges against the "background" of the other area. If one area of the drawing did not exist, the other would be meaningless (Valle, et al., 1989). The figure-ground relationship illustrated in this drawing clearly exemplifies the concept of co-constitutionality, which suggests that individuals "can never be known apart from the world" (Nesti, 2004, p. 12). For this reason, Heidegger's (1962) notion of *being* is more accurately described as *being-in-the-world*.

According to existential-phenomenologists, there are four major grounds of human existence: time, body, world, and others (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). That which becomes figural (or stands out) in a person's experience emerges against one or more of these grounds. Because no two individuals will share the same life experiences, researchers must consider the situational context when trying to understand basic life issues. For example, the act of crying is most commonly associated with sadness. However, tears could also represent emotions such as joy, frustration, and/or rage. Therefore, one person's experience of crying may differ greatly from another person's experience of crying. For this reason, it was important to consider the context in which meaning units were identified in this study. Once each transcript was analyzed, similar meaning units were clustered into groups to develop sub-themes. For the first five transcripts, the primary researcher participated in this process with the help of an interpretive research group. The remaining transcripts were thematized by the primary researcher only.

Interpretive Research Group. The interpretive research group consisted of approximately 10 to 15 faculty members and graduate students from a variety of academic disciplines. "The use of an interpretive research group is important for maintaining the rigor of phenomenological research methods" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 35). Throughout the interpretive process, group members helped to ensure that all meaning units and themes were supported by the text. This deceased the likelihood of bias that the primary researcher might have imposed on the data analysis. In addition, group members provided a variety of perspectives

that enhanced the quality of the interpretive process. All group members signed a pledge of confidentiality prior to working with the transcripts (Appendix E). After sub-themes were identified for each transcript, the next step was to develop general themes. This was achieved by making comparisons across transcripts. To ensure accuracy, all themes and meaning units were continually referenced against the original data (Dale, 1996). This lead to the development of a general thematic structure, which was further examined and refined by the researcher and members of the interpretative group (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Step 5 – Confirming Thematic Structure

The final step, which is perhaps the most important, was to obtain feedback from the participants (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). For the purposes of this study, participant feedback was obtained in two ways. After the interviews were completed, participants were sent a copy of their interview transcript. At this stage, they were provided with the opportunity to correct errors, clarify points, and/or add additional information. After the analysis of transcripts, participants were then sent a draft of preliminary results, including the general thematic structure. Themes were then revised, if necessary, until they accurately reflected the participants' experiences. When agreement was achieved between the researcher, the participants, and the original data, the thematic structure was finalized.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

"The purpose of phenomenological research is to describe the structure of experience, not to describe the characteristics of a group" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 48). Phenomenological research is deemed valid if a logical series of steps are taken to produce results that are supported by the data, accurately represent participant experiences, and are presented in a manner that resonates with the reader. When conducting a qualitative investigation of a specific phenomenon, no two individuals will ever report the same experience. However, the structure of the two experiences is likely to contain many of the same features. As a result, reliability is not determined by replicating the experience, but rather by identifying a thematic structure that captures the essence of the phenomenon. "Using a different group and collecting different examples is meant to broaden the themes that have emerged but not to change their essential thematic pattern as noted during the initial analysis" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 40). The validity and reliability of the current results will ultimately be determined by the reader and how well the thematic structure is representative of his or her experience.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The primary purpose of this study was to explore athlete experiences of great coaching. To achieve this goal, in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted with 18 former elite level athletes. Analysis of the transcripts revealed a total of 1,553 meaning units that were further grouped into sub-themes and general themes (Appendix F). This led to the development of a final thematic structure revealing six major dimensions that characterized these athletes' experiences of great coaching: *Coach Attributes, The Environment, Relationships, The System, Coaching Actions,* and *Influences.* A visual depiction of the thematic structure and interaction between dimensions is shown in Figure 1.

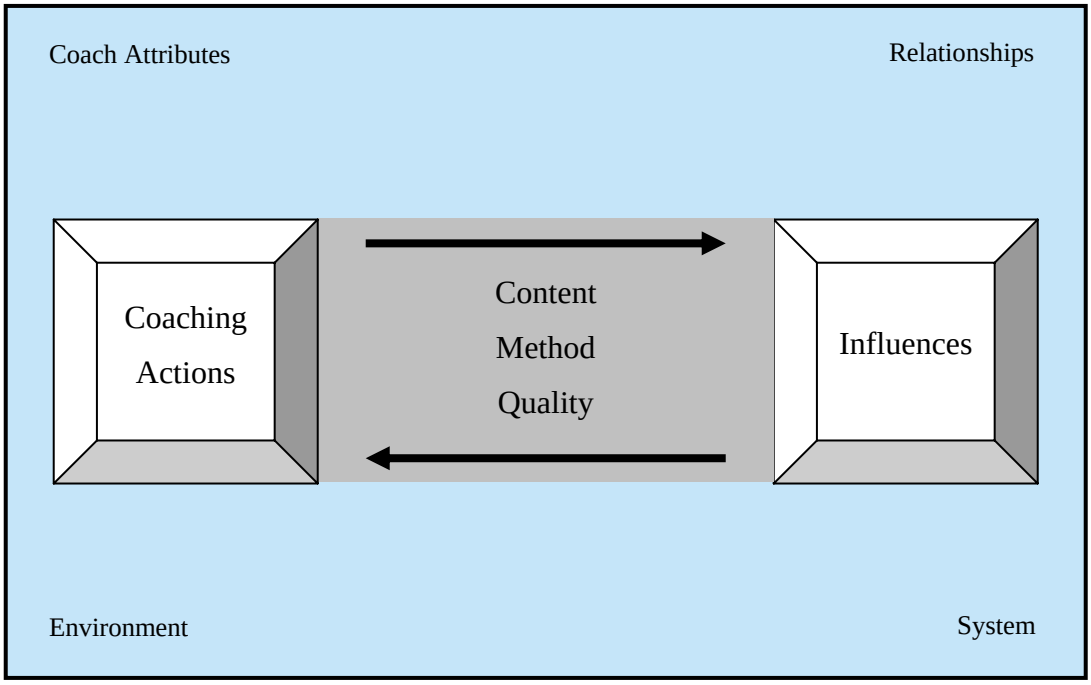

Figure 1. Diagram of Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching

Coaching Actions and *Influences* were the most prominent aspects of these athletes' experiences. The effect of each coaching action was mediated by its content, method, and/or quality. Furthermore, the dimensions of *Coach Attributes*, *The Environment*, *The System*, and *Relationships* served as the background for *Coaching Actions* and *Influences*. As such, these background dimensions had a continuous effect on athlete experiences of great coaching. In the following sections, all of the major dimensions and their respective themes are discussed in detail. Representative quotes supporting each theme are also provided. The letter and number after each quote indicate the participant that made the statement.

Coach Attributes

Coach Attributes emerged as one of the major dimensions representing athlete experiences of great coaching. This dimension encompassed participant descriptions of their coaches' core qualities or internal makeup. The dimension of *Coach Attributes* was comprised of six general themes: *More Than Just a Coach, Personality Characteristics, Abilities, Knowledge, Experience,* and *Imperfections*.

More Than Just a Coach

The athlete participants expressed an appreciation for playing under individuals who were *More Than Just Coaches.* They were great people who willingly served in a variety of roles that went beyond the playing field. Athletes viewed their coaches as *teachers*, *mentors*, *friends*, and *parental figures*. This was especially significant when athletes described their experiences at the collegiate level. "Being away from home and

really having someone to look up to and coach you, and mentor you, and help you with anything you needed" was important (p6). "It gave you a sense of not only to want to win for your team, but to want to win for [your coach] and make him proud of you" (p6).

Participants also held their coaches in high esteem and often compared them to others in the field. One athlete described how her coach was "light years ahead of any other coach [she] had ever played for" (p12). Great coaches are not average, they are *experts* and "people who are experts in their field see things more clearly and quicker than lay people" (p17). As a result, they become known for who they are and what they do. One athlete referred to his coach as "an absolute legend" (p7).

Although athletes viewed their coaches in high regard, they also saw them as *human* beings. They described how these great coaches were not afraid to make mistakes, show faults, or admit that they didn't have all the answers. "They don't act like they are better than you or above you" (p3). Instead, they "come down to your level and act human" (p3). Athletes felt that their coaches were particularly human when they expressed emotions.

> I remember the time [my coach] cried. It really shocked the hell out of us. One of his [former] players was 40 something years old and was playing basketball and dropped dead of a heart attack. They called [my coach] while we were in a video meeting and he totally broke down right there. He left and came back and tried to explain why and he totally broke down and left again... So I guess the human side of him came out a little bit there too. But I remember being pretty impressed. I think it was just expanding who he was as a person. I think we were all shocked

> because you just picture this old school guy who was willing to cry in front of a bunch of guys. (p7)

Personality Characteristics

Personality Characteristics represented another theme within the dimension of *Coach Attributes*. Athletes discussed their coaches' core qualities, which were *cognitive, emotional, social,* and *psychological* in nature. One of the fundamental characteristics that emerged within the *cognitive* domain related to the coach's knowledge. Participants viewed knowledge as one of the more obvious requisites for achieving greatness. "If you don't know what you're doing, you're not going to be very good at it" (p2). The athletes in this study emphasized how their coaches were very knowledgeable about the most up-to-date techniques, strategies, and tactics of the game. They also expressed how their coaches were "always learning and always bringing that [information back to the team]" (p2).

> My coach was a devout student of the game. He spent his life watching soccer, studying soccer, training under other coaches, and attending seminars or clinics. I think he became an incredible student and absorber of knowledge because of his love and passion for the game. (p17)

Not surprisingly, *passion* emerged as one of the key characteristics within the *emotional* domain of personality characteristics. One athlete expressed how "You could feel it in [the coach's] presence, the way he ran his practices... in everything he did" (p5). The passion that these great coaches exuded was not only for the game, but also for the people. "I think my coach wanted to work with young people. He enjoyed the process of

getting his team better. He liked seeing a kid develop personality wise" (p14), and it was always about "making sure that you were okay as a person before addressing [anything related to the sport]" (p12).

Athletes also described their coaches as *inspirational* and *enthusiastic*. Having a coach with an upbeat attitude was particularly important to the athletes when they experienced performance lulls or fatigue.

> When you're in college, you're playing on the weekends, so you're looking forward to it all week. [In the minor leagues], you're playing every single day and [by the end of the season] you kind of lose the adrenaline rush as far as getting excited to play every day... At that time of the year, everybody is just drained. So having somebody out there [on the field] who was not just dry and going through the motions, but was always laughing, joking around, having a good time, [and] always upbeat… I think it carried throughout our team. (p2)

Based on the comments of these athletes, it appears that great coaches use their emotions to regulate their athletes' energy during competition. In the following example, a soccer player described the effect of her coach's emotional outburst during a halftime break.

> It was my first game back and I remember it was raining. It was like sheets of freezing cold wind. We were down 2-0 at half time and everybody came into the locker room and we were just really down. The locker room was silent. We kind of got dominated in the first half and people were complaining about how cold it was and how miserable it was... And I never really heard [my coach] yell like this before because he wasn't really a yeller, he was a pretty calm guy... but he starts yelling at us... and we were all bundled up with gloves and hats and long sleeve

> stuff underneath our jerseys and everything... I mean, we were freezing. So he proceeds to take off all of his gloves and his hat and his shirt... and he strips down to a pair of shorts and his tennis shoes and one of these paper thin practice shirts and says, “It is not cold out there!” And he’s screaming, “It’s not cold!” And he says, “I’ll see you out there on the field.” Then he walked out of the locker room. And we ended up coming out of the locker room all fired up. (p12)

While this coach influenced players by expressing himself in a manner that was somewhat out of character, athletes also discussed situations where coaches were “able to elicit emotions out of players without coming off as being very emotional” (p12). It appears that situational factors (such as athletes’ energy levels) dictate the timing and manner in which great coaches express their emotions. In the following example, a volleyball player described how his coach’s calm demeanor helped to regulate player excitement during games:

> If player emotions started taking off, he would call a time out and you would come over and he was very calming and it kind of hit a reset button on you to be able to go back out on the court and perform. We were never going to be on his level because we had too much adrenaline and testosterone, but the fact that he was down 10 levels brought us down 2 levels to where we needed to be. (p6)

The key seems to be that great coaches have the ability to appropriately control their emotions. In fact, athletes primarily viewed their coaches as *emotionally stable*. “He would get excited and he would get down (p6), but he wasn’t emotionally fragile” (p17). “He was like our rock” (p12), and “the key to our confidence was his steady emotional state throughout the season” (p6).

In addition to *emotional* qualities, athletes also described personality characteristics that were more *social* in nature. This category encompassed those core attributes that influence how great coaches generally act in relationship to others. More specifically, athletes felt that their coaches were *genuine*, *honest*, and *loyal*. This suggests that great coaches have a high level of integrity and when they exhibit these qualities, it makes athletes start to believe and trust in them. "It makes you want to go out there and do a good job and play hard every day" (p9). Not only that, but it gains the athletes' respect.

Participants also described how their coaches were *patient*, especially when it came to performance or team issues. One athlete described how her coach reacted to a couple of teammates who were acting selfishly:

> I've never seen so much patience with players. Any of my other coaches would have probably yelled at them in front of people or at least like berated them and let it be known to the team that they didn't agree with these players... but my coach was interesting. He probably had individual talks with these people, but you never got the feeling that he didn't like anybody (p12).

Not only did athletes experience their coaches as *patient*, but also as *non-judgmental*. Whether it was dealing with a behavioral issue or a performance mistake, athletes viewed their coaches as understanding. One athlete felt comfortable enough to tell his coach that he was experiencing fatigue and needed some time off. "I knew that he would be positive about it and would try to help me out" (p2).

Coach characteristics that were categorized in the *psychological* domain were related to achievement, attitude, and organization. Great coaches appear to truly enjoy

what they do and this is evident in their *commitment* and *discipline*. One athlete described how her coach was more disciplined than anybody she had ever met. Another athlete discussed how his coach would "come in [to work] at 6:00am in the morning and leave at 12:30 or 1:00 at night. If you don't work at it, you won't be great. You could have all the talent in the world and you'll be mediocre, but all great coaches push themselves" to work hard (p1). They are driven by their *competitive* attitude and their desire to win. "[My coach] hated to lose and you knew that when you played for him." As a result, great coaches are willing to do whatever it takes from a coaching perspective to achieve the results they desire.

It was also noted that great coaches are *confident* in their abilities and hold themselves and others to high standards. In fact, many athletes described their coaches as *perfectionists*. Regardless of what it was, great coaches wanted it done right. This was not only evident in the way they ran practices, but also in they way they were *organized*. My coach "always had sort of a master plan in terms of practices" (p10). "We used to look at [the coach's plans] and go, 'What is this?' There were so many numbers on there. The guy was meticulous" (p7).

Athletes also described their coaches as *professional*. No matter what they were doing, they did it with *character*, *class*, and *respect for others*. One athlete described her coach as professional because he was always "calm, cool, and collected" (p9). She viewed him as "a gracious loser and a humble winner" (p9). The professionalism that these great coaches exhibited helped them gain their athletes' admiration, trust, and respect.

Another aspect of great coaches' personalities that helped gain these athletes' respect was *consistency*. This was evident in the way the coach acted. "You would see them on the field acting the same way they acted off the field" (p2). They were also consistent in the way they managed the team, prepared for games, and communicated with athletes. "If he said he was going to be there, he would be there. If he said that he was going to help you do something, he would help you" (p15). As a result, athletes knew what to expect. "When they are consistent, it's very clear what they want from you" (p9).

Abilities

In addition to personality characteristics, athletes also identified their coaches as having exceptional *abilities.* This emerged as another major theme within the dimension of *Coach Attributes*. *Abilities* were characterized as special talents and/or competencies that coaches possessed. One of the dominant sub-themes within this category was related to the coaches' ability *to adapt*. Athletes discussed how their coaches adapted over time. "He's not the same coach he was when I played for him" (p10). "He's a little softer than he was, but it's probably just as we age, we get smarter" (p1). Athletes also described how great coaches adapted in relationship to society, to their sport, and to the athletes that played for them. They don't change their philosophies, they just change what they expect or ask of their athletes. A football player emphasized the importance of adapting to athletes, especially as they progress to higher levels of competition. "When I was in high school, you could grab my face mask, you could shake my head or whatever. If you do that now, you're in trouble" (p1). This also speaks to the value of coaches taking time to

get to know their athletes, a concept that is further discussed later within the dimension of *relationships*.

The athletes in this study also described how their coaches worked within their own personalities. “You can’t change who you are and you can’t be something that you’re not. You just have to emphasize what you’re good at and let your assistants do what you’re not good at” (p10). Based on these athletes’ experiences, it appears that great coaches effectively use their assistant coaches and other support personnel such as strength and conditioning coaches, athletic trainers, and sport psychologists.

In addition, athletes expressed the importance of having coaches who didn’t separate their personal and professional lives. Once again, these coaches were *consistent* across domains and for some athletes, “none of it was separated” (p3). They didn’t just want us to be a part of their team, “they wanted us to be a part of everything. Basically we were a part of their family” (p3). One athlete even suggested that the way his coach treated his players was similar to the way he cared for his own son.

The ability to accurately evaluate player potential represented another theme that put these coaches in the category of greatness. “Sometimes it’s about putting people in the right positions” (p14), and “he’s good at knowing what people are capable of doing. When I came in, I didn’t know what position I played and he told me [I would] be a great outside hitter” (p5). “He was just a brilliant assessor of talent” (p17).

Experience

Another theme that emerged within the dimension of *Coach Attributes* was related to the coaches’ background and *experience*. For the most part, athletes described

veteran coaches who were highly respected within their sports. In fact, coaches with established reputations often received an automatic level of credibility with their athletes. When coaches have experience, “it’s easier to buy into what [they’re] trying to teach” (p7). One athlete described how “most younger coaches will stop play more often [in practice]. My coach didn’t stop play as much. When he did stop play, he made a point that was very salient and I think that just comes with experience” (p12). Another athlete talked about how his coach “was good at using past coaching experiences to help him make current decisions” (p11).

In addition to having a wealth of coaching experience, athletes also considered their coaches as great due to their own playing experiences. “He wasn’t just basing himself on something he read” (p17). “He played on the national team and he played in college and I think that gave him more respect and credibility” (p6). “I’ve always listened a little bit more attentively to coaches who have done the things that they are teaching and have been on the court and in those situations. They can draw from their experiences and they know what does and what doesn’t work” (p17). They know what it’s like to be “fighting in the trenches” (p16). Great coaches have an idea of what their players are actually experiencing, which contributes to their level of understanding and enhances their ability to provide additional information. “He played the game, so he kind of gave us the inside... he taught us all the ins and outs and that made him an exceptional coach” (p1).

Imperfections

The final theme to emerge within the dimension of *Coach Attributes* was *imperfections*. Athletes identified their coaches as great, but this did not mean that their coaches were perfect. A few of the athletes discussed how their coaches were sometimes lacking *interpersonal*, *emotional*, and/or *management* skills. One athlete felt that his coach "came up a little short of ideal in terms of player and personnel management. I think he could have been a little more interactive and a little less tyrannical" (p17). "He was very knowledgeable, but didn't have a people personality" (p2), and "I believe his style turned off certain people to the point where they didn't maximize their abilities" (p17). However, another athlete emphasized the importance of taking "the best parts of [each coach] because some coaches can be really bad communicators, but when they show you something, they can be picture perfect. I don't think any coach is fully developed in all areas. I don't think there is a perfect coach" (p9).

Although some athletes described their coaches as imperfect, they also said that great coaches have the ability to overcome shortcomings. One athlete described how her coach made up for his lack of experience. "I never thought that I would put him at the top of my best coaches list when I first started out because he was so young and he wasn't experienced, but he was just so inspirational. He's just a natural leader and because of this, his shortcomings as a tactical coach didn't matter" (p12).

The Environment

The Environment emerged as a second major dimension representing athlete experiences of great coaching. The environment was defined as the overall context in

which all actions and interactions between coach and athlete occurred. According to athlete descriptions, great coaches fostered three types of environments: *the general team environment, the one-on-one communication environment*, and *the practice environment*. Although these three environments are discussed separately in the following sections, they should be viewed as interconnected and function as part of the context that formed a backdrop for these athletes' experiences of great coaching.

The General Team Environment

The *general team environment* represented the overall climate that coaches created. One of the fundamental components of this climate was that it was *athlete centered*. "There was never any jealousy or worrying about your coach stealing the limelight" (p14). "Every single day you could tell that they were putting their best out there for you" (p7). When players performed well, coaches "never actually took any credit" (p12). One coach told his players, "This game is about you. It's not about me. When I was playing the game, it was about the players not about the coaches" (p2). This appears to be an important aspect of great coaching because coaches that "put their players ahead of them and do everything they can for the players are the [ones] that in the end get better results for themselves" (p2).

In addition to being *athlete centered*, participants described the general environment created by great coaches as *team centered*. "Coaches are always doing what's best for the team because there is enough selfishness going on within the team" (p9). Great coaches don't want anyone around "that was going to hurt or jeopardize the team" (p3). "They limited us from talking to the media. They would try to keep us from

spreading any kind of gossip or rumors outside. They would tell us that whatever was going on to keep it within the team" (p16). These coaches didn't want their athletes "doing or saying anything that would be a distraction to the team. It wasn't an issue about you crossing [the coaches'] line, it was an issue about you crossing the team's line " (p6). In fact, "rules were set up so that players would be accountable to themselves and to the team" (p6).

The rules that coaches established also helped to facilitate a *general team environment* that was *structured*. "As young guys, you like to goof off and monkey around and [my coach] would tolerate that to an extent, but the rules were the rules. You didn't do anything to embarrass your team or your school, and certainly not your coach" (p17). "There wasn't any room for breaking the rules. You did and you would sit out a game or you would get kicked out of practice. The consequences were stern and everyone knew what they were and therefore the rules were so rarely broken that they never really had to be enforced" (p6). However, athletes also expressed that when disciplinary actions were necessary, they were put into place without favoritism. Coaches "equally applied the rules to the star [players] and the bench warmers" (p17).

Athletes described the team environment as *family-like* and believed that the "atmosphere stemmed from the coaches all the way down to the players" (p3). Coaches established this environment by caring for their players and engaging with them both on and off the field. "Our team went to the coach's house [on different occasions] and we were like a part of the family" (p3). One athlete even felt "like the freshman and sophomores [were] little siblings and as seniors, you have to act like big sisters" (p3). "If you knew that a teammate or a coach was hurting, you just wanted to be there for them

and the same was true when something good happened" (p3). "We were all in it together trying to win and I think that's why we did" (p1). Athletes also noted, that "even when you are finished playing and you leave the program, you never really leave. You can't go out there and practice anymore and you can't play, but you're still a part of the family" (p3). With this type of an atmosphere, it was not surprising that athletes experienced the *general team environment* created by great coaches as full of *support*, *care*, and *trust*.

The One-On-One Communication Environment

Athletes discussed how their coaches established an environment that was conducive to *one-on-one communication.* Great coaches not only make themselves *accessible*, but are also *approachable*. One athlete didn't think there was ever a time when her coach's office door was closed. In fact, many athletes shared how they could talk to their coach about anything regardless of whether it was related to their sport or their personal life. Great coaches are *open* to conversation and are also good listeners. "You could go into the coach's office and he would be all ears" (p6). This helped to create an atmosphere that was *comfortable* for the athletes. "You never felt like you were stepping over a boundary if you were to walk into their office and ask them a question" (p9). These comments suggest that great coaches are non-judgmental and understanding.

The Practice Environment

Athletes described *the practice environment* as being well *planned*, highly *structured,* and *game-like*. "Everything had a purpose" (p8). "We practiced situations that were likely to occur in games" (p15). "We had to focus in on every possession. You're

not just going through the motions" (p8). Great coaches expect their athletes to work hard and "were demanding of every player no matter what they did" (p8). "We were always hustling whether we were playing a scrimmage or getting a drink" (p8). The atmosphere that these athletes described was also *intense* and *competitive*. "The guys competed at such a high level for such a long period of time that we just developed more than other teams. Our second team could beat a lot of teams in the country" (p7). Despite the high level of competitiveness, athletes also experienced a sense of security. Once they earned a starting position, they didn't feel as if they could lose it by making a mistake or doing something wrong.

In general, athletes experienced the practice environment as positive. They worked hard, but there was also "a time and a place for fun" (p3). Although great coaches may often joke around, their players clearly understand when they can have fun and when they need to be serious:

> He always made it fun, but it was business. I think you knew the difference. There was a time where you could screw around and have fun and be doing your thing, but when you got on the court whether it was practice or game time, it was all business and everyone knew that and you're all on the same page. (p6)

The System

The System emerged as a third major dimension that was fundamental to these athletes' experiences of great coaching. In sport, coaching actions and interactions are often based on established beliefs and/or philosophies. *The System* represents the framework in which coaches implement their philosophies. An example of this was

provided by a former basketball player. My coach "believed that we could play nine guys and get our nine guys better than [another team's] six guys" (p14). The offensive strategies that he implemented were based on this philosophy. "We ran the Flex offense and it was pretty simple how we were going to beat [teams]. We were going to wear them out and we were going to foul them out and that's what it came down to all the time when he talked" (p14).

Another athlete described how her coach's system "was based on the team [they] were playing or what [they] were good at during that particular year" (p4). "It was all about figuring out everyone's strength and focusing on those strengths and how to put everyone together with those strengths to make the team great" (p7). Basically, "the system is just the way they put things in, the installation of a plan, the work week, the philosophy of practice, and how the days are structured" (p1). Athletes viewed their coaches as great not just because of the system that they implemented, but also because of the way they believed in the system. "It's the way they believed in teaching and coaching and having relationships" (p14).

Relationships

Relationships emerged as a fourth major dimension representing athlete experiences of great coaching. The relationships that athletes experienced with their coaches were *professional*, but also *personal*. "She was my coach, but also a friend" (p13). Establishing a close relationship appeared to be important to the athletes. "Having a good relationship helps. It's just one thing that you don't have to worry about. There are so many things going on [and if you have a good relationship with your coach], that's just

one piece of the puzzle that if you don't have to worry about makes it a lot easier" (p2). "If you can't kind of have that connection, it makes it rough" (p3). For the most part, these athletes were able to develop *strong* and *lasting* relationships with their coaches. "Your great coaches you always remember who they are and what they do and where they are now" (p16). "I'm still friends with coach to this day. I feel like I could walk into his office tomorrow and not miss a beat" (p14). "It's rare to get to have a [coach] like that" (p2).

Personal Relationship

The athletes never felt as if their coaches imposed a personal relationship on them. "As much of a relationship you wanted to have with coach, whether big or small, you could have" (p8), but there were also *boundaries*. "You could have fun with coach and he would let you pick at him, but there was never a sense that you would ever disrespect him or that you were on the same level. He was always the coach and you were always the player" (p6). According to these athletes, great coaches effectively manage relationships by remaining objective when dealing with their players. The level to which personal connections develop never influences a great coach's ability to make fair and difficult decisions. These athletes also seemed to understand where their coach's boundary was set. "You respect the coach to where you are not going to cross that line to where you are taking advantage" (p11). The boundary is not a problem when "you aren't being treated or asking to be treated differently than anybody else on the team" (p11). Although these athletes experienced their coaches as treating players fairly, some also felt that their relationship with their coach was unique. As one athlete expressed, "I don't

think every player has [a personal relationship] with every coach" (p2). Some of the athletes even expressed a love for their coach.

Several variables seemed to contribute to the development of these athletes' unique relationships with their coaches. Great coaches gain their athletes' *trust*, *confidence*, and *respect*. This requires little effort for coaches that have established reputations, extensive knowledge, and/or many years of experience. For other coaches, it is achieved through hard work. Participants suggested that their coaches "gained respect out of love, not fear" (p4). They were *honest*, *loyal*, and *treated athletes with kindness*. The athletes noted that their coaches never exerted power or required a need for over-respect. One athlete expressed how her coach's "respect for the players ended up winning their respect for him" (p12). "I think when you have that in the mix, then it's easy to buy into what the coach is selling" (p13). "That's how you get the best out of athletes" (p3). A coach's respect influences athletes' motivation and coachability. When there is mutual trust and respect, athletes are more open to "criticism and they take coaching and they take teaching better" (p14).

Great coaches also establish personal relationships by being *athlete centered*. They *show an interest* in their athletes not only as players, but also as people. A former basketball player said, "I was between the 12th and 15th man the majority of my career and my coach was always interested in me, always interested in my parents, and he didn't have to be" (p14). According to these athletes, great coaches make their athletes feel as if they are a *priority*. "Coach invested time, energy, and effort into me" (p5). "She never told me no for anything whether it was watching extra tape before practice or doing an extra workout. Whatever it was, she never said no" (p8). When coaches make that extra

effort, players feel valued. A former baseball player expressed a similar sentiment. “I wasn’t just one of the 25 players on the team. I was more than just a number” (p11). Feeling valued makes athletes want to do well. “If you have value and worth, that’s when you want to do your best and perform to the best you can” (p3).“It helps you play better too because you are not just playing for yourself. You’re playing for yourself, your teammates, and your coaches” (p5).

These athletes also felt that their coach was *somebody they could relate too*. One athlete expressed how his coach could “get on the level of the player no matter what their personality was” (p15). Another athlete felt as if his coach “related to the guys because he was a player himself and he knows players’ mentalities” (p6). Other factors that help great coaches relate to their athletes include sharing similar interests, telling stories, and using humor. These athletes often remarked how their coaches “would laugh and kind of joke about things” (p15).

Not only do great coaches relate to their athletes, but they also get to know them on a personal level. This is perhaps one of the most important aspects of great coaching because coaches have to know their athletes in order to get their attention, provide feedback, and motivate them. Some athletes are motivated by “carrots and some by sticks. Some follow for reasons of wanting to please their coach and succeed and others follow because they’re just scared to death” (p17). Great coaches seem to know exactly which buttons to push for each athlete. One athlete shared how his coach “could always find the nerve in everybody and he knew how to strike it. If he needed to sit you down and chew your ass, he would. If he needed to put his arm around you and be a big brother

or father figure to you, he would" (p15). Getting to the know athletes on a personal level helps enhance great coaches' effectiveness.

Based on the comments of these athletes, great coaches also allow their athletes to get to know them. "My coach shared enough about his own life and his own past experiences and his own kids and his wife that it made him seem human" (p6). Learning about the coach off the field helps athletes understand what their coaches' expect on the field. "If you know them, it's easier for you to play because you [know] what they want and you can relax and not second guess [yourself]" (p13). "Him really getting to know who I was and vice versa made for a really strong bond" (p15).

Other factors that made the relationship these athletes had with their coaches feel *athlete centered* related to the *support* and *caring* their coaches provided. "I felt like coach was always there for me regardless of whether it was professional or personal" (p9). "Coach was literally there for you every step of the way no matter what you were doing" (p15). The athletes also believed that their coaches wanted them to succeed. Coach "wanted me to grow and develop as a player and a person" and "the office door was always open if you had a problem or needed anything" (p9). These athletes seemed to genuinely feel that their coaches cared about more than just performance outcomes. They "made sure that the players were okay as people (like what was going on in their life) before addressing [anything related to the sport]" (p12). This level of caring gained the athletes' respect and made them want to "do extra and go the extra mile" (p7).

Professional Relationship

Although many components of the personal and professional coach-athlete relationship discussed by these athletes cannot be separated, the *professional relationship* they spoke of pertained more specifically to the manner in which their coaches treated them as players. One of the major themes to emerge within this relationship was *respect.* Great coaches never embarrass, berate, or publicly humiliate their players in front of their teammates or people outside the team. This was important for these athletes because "if you sit there and tear a [player] apart, they're just going to end up going more and more down hill" (p3). Instead, many of the athletes described how their coaches "got people to respond without yelling" (p5). If their coaches got upset, the players could tell by the coach's demeanor or mannerisms. Great coaches never need to "tear [athletes] down and yell at them or go crazy like some coaches do" (p5).

In addition, the coaches these athletes spoke of never pointed the finger after a loss or put the blame on their athletes. If their team failed, they took responsibility. However, they also encouraged their athletes to take responsibility and *held them accountable* for their actions. A football player noted, "You could have great athletes and not win. Somebody has to hold you accountable. A great athlete doesn't always hold himself accountable" (p1). Some of the methods great coaches use to hold their athletes accountable are team rules, peer pressure, playing time, and performance statistics. These athletes seemed to feel that when individuals are not held accountable, they more likely to go through the motions. A basketball player emphasized this point:

> When we did position break down shooting drills in high school it was like, "Alright, go get your partner and go to the other end [of the court] and do that."

> So sometimes you'd go through the motions, but [in college] everything was charted. So at the end of practice, it showed on the board. "Alright, Lopez made 70% of her shots today. The other guards maybe made 80%." Everything was charted and there was something attached to everything whether it was positive reinforcement or some type of repercussion. (p8)

Although these athletes said their coaches held them accountable for their actions, they never felt that their coaches held grudges. "There were rules and there were going to be punishments, but [coach never] held anything over your head or kept anything against you" (p6). It appears that great coaches get their point across to the athletes and then let it go. A baseball player shared the following experience:

> [My coach] is one of those guys that would get in your face if he needed too. If you go out there and make a bonehead play and lose the game the night before, he'll get into you a little bit after the game and tell you what you need to be told, but he'll come back the next day and it's like it never happened. You know, it's "how's it going?" He's the first person to say something to you. He was always able to get over it and the next day it was like it never happened. (p2)

These athletes also felt that their coaches never showed any favoritism for certain players. In fact, one athlete expressed how she "never got the feeling that [her coach] didn't like someone. Outwardly, he treated everybody the same" (p12). "He didn't care if you were his best friend or his worst enemy, he was going to play you if you were the best" (p7). "The majority of the time, you were playing or not playing based on your numbers. If your numbers are up and you're doing the things that he needs you to do then he will play you" (p6). These participants felt that their coaches were fair regardless of whether an

athlete was a starter or a non-starter. The athletes knew that eventually their coach would give them an opportunity to earn playing time. As one athlete expressed, “I never worried. I just knew that I would get a shot and I just knew that it was up to me to take advantage of that shot” (p7).

The professional relationship established by great coaches is also *athlete centered.* “They accept who you are [as a player] when you come in. It’s not like their way or the highway. You have habits in the way you play and coach isn’t going to transform you into a different player” (p3). “There are a lot of ways to get things done” (p2). The primary goal for these athletes’ coaches was to execute the task. It didn’t have to be performed according to textbook in order to be okay. Rather than focus on minor technical imperfections, great coaches *build on players’ strengths*. This point was emphasized by a baseball pitcher:

> My coach would always find the one thing that you did well and he’d run with it. So for myself, he knew that I knew how to pitch. Not so much that I had the best fastball, off-speed stuff, or anything like that. He just knew that I was a pretty crafty guy. He knew that I had an idea of how to get people out and he was very much the same type of player. So instead of saying, “Okay, we’re going to work on a bunch of different things to make you the guy I want you to be,” he would say, “Alright, this is what you do well. Okay, that works. Let’s try to make it the best that we can.” He would look at what you did well and he would milk it for everything that it was worth.

Not only do great coaches build on player strengths, but they also show confidence in their athletes. As an athlete, “you want to do well and [coach] looks and talks to you like

you are going to. There is no doubt in his mind and therefore you don't even have the ability to question yourself" (p6). "It was almost like [coach] put faith in people and people would perform" (p7). These athletes got the feeling that their coach always *believed in them*. "Even when he'd rip into you, he would never make you feel like you were a horrible player, but he would let you know, 'Hey, I think you can do better'" (p9). "He was good at knowing what people were capable of and what he wanted from them and he would push them until he got out of them what he wanted" (p5). Great coaches never settle for mediocre. As one athlete expressed, "He pushed us to be the best athletes we could both mentally and physically and he would do anything he could to get you there" (p5). Great coaches inspire athletes to play hard, believe in themselves, and reach their potential. This is demonstrated by the coach's positive approach and constant belief in players. These athletes felt that their coaches were "really there to help [the players], not just make themselves look good" (p2).

Another factor that made the professional relationship feel *athlete centered* for these athletes was that their coaches provided them with opportunities to get involved in decisions. A basketball player shared how his coach let the players make decisions regarding off days, pre-season conditioning, practice schedules, uniforms, and where they would eat on road trips. "The guys on the team never got to design any plays or call plays, but he made it feel like it was our team. He gave us ownership" (p14).

Great coaches also *empower* players by getting them involved in the recruiting process. When a recruit was visiting, several of these players said they would get little assignments. One coach told his players, "Here is [the athlete] we're bringing in. I want you to tell him what it's like to be here, but I want to know what you think of him too"

(p14). These athletes' coaches were looking to recruit good players, but also good people that would fit with their program. As a result, coaches took their players' opinions seriously. One athlete said:

> We always had veto power and sometimes we exercised it. There was an instance where the kid obviously did not have a lifestyle that we felt was conducive to what the team wanted. So we made a point to tell the coach. We said, "We don't think this kid fits in with what we want. (p14)

Providing athletes with opportunities to get involved and make decisions made these athletes feel empowered. It helped them buy into their coach's system and how they were going to work as a team.

Coaching Actions

This fifth dimension of *Coaching Actions* was comprised of seven general themes: *Teach, Communicate, Motivate, Respond, Prepare, Perform,* and *Disregard the Irrelevant*. Furthermore, the content, method, and quality of coaching actions served as mediators that influenced these athletes' experience.

Teach

One of the most basic actions that great coaches engage in is *teaching*. These athletes discussed how their coaches taught them *sport skills* that were *cognitive*, *physical*, and *mental*. *Cognitive Skills* were related to the knowledge of the sport. This included game strategies, tactics, and systems of play. *Physical Skills* encompassed fitness, performance techniques, and fundamental game skills. *Mental Skills* included

focus, imagery, anticipation, and mindset. While most of the coaches teaching was sport specific, these athletes also expressed how "great coaches actually teach you about life" (p16). The category of *Life Skills* included *Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs*. Some of the life skills that these athletes learned were respect, patience, and self-reliance. They also learned how to deal with pressure, handle adversity, and work with others. Not only did their coaches teach them these skills, but they also modeled them. As one athlete expressed, "We learned to have a good attitude because coach had a good attitude" (p2).

In addition to modeling behaviors, it appears that great coaches adopt a multi-dimensional approach to teaching their athletes. According to these athletes, their coaches used a combination of *verbal*, *visual*, and *physical methods*. A football player stated, "Some people get it from reading it, some people get it from the visual, and some people get it from actually doing it, but those are the three ways [that coaches presented it]" (p1). *Verbal methods* included basic instruction, feedback, and questioning. One athlete talked about how his coach encouraged players to be active rather than passive learners. "He would question you and make you think about what you were doing and why it was wrong and what you needed to do next time" (p11). "Then he would tell you what he saw" (p1).

Some of the *visual methods* that great coaches implement to teach skills are physical demonstrations, chalk talks, scouting reports, and video clips. "I'm a visual learner so she didn't just talk to me. She kind of got in there with me and showed me, held my hand, and we video-taped" (p13). "A lot of coaches teach you how to study film, how to study a different player, how to study your opponent" (p16). As a result, these

athletes developed the ability to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. In fact, some athletes even got to the point where they could coach themselves.

Physical teaching methods included manual manipulation and repetition. Manual manipulation represented instances in which the "coach physically moved [players] to certain places" (p17). However, most of these athletes focused on how their coaches emphasized repetition. "It was just making you do it over and over and over again until you got it right" (p5). Repetition did not mean going through the motions. Great coaches emphasize perfect practice. As one player shared:

> I think we ran 80 something perfect plays one day after practice and we would get to 9 and the coaches would say, "Such and such didn't run up to the line. Start back to zero." You know, and you are sitting there and you think about it... if you do it perfect in practice, it carries over to the game. If you're body position, hand placement, and... If you get all of that down, everything else will take care of itself… and I think that's how practicing perfect came into play. (p1)

Although the methods these athletes' coaches implemented to teach skills have been discussed separately in this section, it is important to note that coaches often used them in combination to maximize athlete learning.

The athletes also described the *quality* of their coaches' teaching methods. They emphasized how their coaches paid "great attention to the little details" (p13). They had the ability to "pull out the finer things when teaching a player" (p14). When they provided instruction, it was very specific. They never told their players to "just get it done" (p1). Instead, they explained exactly how to get it done. These athletes also mentioned how their coaches simplified the process. One athlete explained how his coach

"always found a way to break things down to the most simplistic sense" (p15). Another athlete said that his coach sometimes had players practice their skills in slow motion. Training sessions were designed so that there was a progression from simple to complex. "You would start out small and go big and he would build on his teachings. When we moved from simple to complex, the purpose of the drill was not lost... the same theme runs through each progression." Taken together, these athletes' comments suggest that great coaches paces their instruction according to each athletes' learning curve.

Communicate

Another major theme that emerged within *Coaching Actions* was *communication*. Athletes repeatedly discussed how their coaches communicated *basic performance information, player roles, expectations, individual goals,* and *a common team vision.* "We knew exactly what coach wanted us to do in terms of getting better, improving, and helping the team" (p17). These athletes' coaches communicated what to do, but more importantly "how to get it done" (p1). Additionally, their coaches wanted "things to be done in a particular way for a reason" (p4) and provided reasons (e.g., *why* they were running a particular drill or *why* a certain individual might not play) for what they were asking athletes to do.

According to these athletes, great coaches use a variety of *methods* to communicate. One aspect of effective communication is first getting athletes' attention. For some athletes this meant "speaking softly or yelling and screaming" (p1). For others, it was using analogies, telling stories, or "saying things that had a little bit of shock value" (p6). These athletes believed their coaches figured out "what excited each player

and found a way to grab their attention" (p8). Their coaches also conducted individual meetings with players. These meetings were designed to gather opinions, discuss goals, or simply check the players' status in terms of academics and/or personal issues. No matter what was discussed, these athletes felt that their coaches always listened.

The participants discussed several indirect forms of coach communication. A water polo player explained, "My coach communicated through his organization of practices. The way that practices were organized helped us know where we stood" on the team (p10). A baseball player discussed how his coach communicated messages through certain players that were highly respected by their teammates. The athletes also expressed how their coaches communicated through facial expressions and/or physical mannerisms. "We just knew when he was getting heated or excited or whether it was an angry mad or if he was happy that we were winning. You could tell by his demeanor" (p5).

Athletes described the *quality* of their coaches' communication as clear, consistent, and honest. Rather than telling players what they wanted to hear, they would tell them the truth. A soccer player emphasized this point:

> Coach would never say something false. He wouldn't give you false compliments. If you're telling somebody that they're awesome and they're playing great and then in training, you take them out of the starting line-up and play them in the reserves, they you're sending them a mixed message. (p9)

The athletes in this study did not feel that their coaches sent mixed messages. Instead, they explained how their coaches' actions were always consistent with their words.

Athletes described their coaches' communication as *appropriate, positive,* and *well timed.* "You have to have constructive criticism, but you don't want to have a coach

that continually bangs on you until you wear down. It's okay to have some negative points sometimes, but it can't always be negative, there's got to be a balance" (p2). One athlete described how she never heard a negative word come out of her coach's mouth. It appeared that most of these athletes' coaches rarely even yelled. Yelling was only used when it was necessary to get the athletes' attention. Athletes also talked about how their coaches were good at knowing when to step in and talk to players and when to leave them alone.

Motivate

Another theme that emerged within the dimension of *Coaching Actions* was motivation. Athletes described how their coaches motivated them to learn the game, work hard, and become the best players they could be. "When you have a coach that is super motivating, it makes you want to play for them" (p5). Part of what was motivating to these athletes was who their coaches were. The other part was what their coaches did. However, the most important factor for these athletes was that their coaches "touched something inside of them" (p8).

Some players were motivated because coaches were caring and passionate. Others were motivated out of respect or the desire to please their coach. One athlete described how his coach motivated the team by creating energy with his enthusiasm and upbeat attitude:

> At the end of the season, everyone is worn out physically and mentally. You are just trying to get through [each day] more than anything. So when [your coach] is

> bouncing around and is encouraging and is always saying something, it does carry over and guys see that and get more into the game. (p2)

Coaches also motivated athletes by providing them with short-term performance goals or a vision for the future. One athlete quoted his high school coach who said, “I’ve never really had too many Division I players come through my program, but all four of you could do it if you’re willing to commit yourself to doing it” (p7). This gave the athletes something to strive for. Regardless of whether it was joking around or telling stories, athletes felt that their coaches’ motivational strategies were individualized. As one athlete expressed, “He finds a way to motivate each player and then does it either by appealing to your emotional side or to play for your teammates or to play because of something the other team said about you. He finds a way to motivate everyone” (p9).

Prepare For Competition

Preparing athletes for competition was another aspect of the actions of these athletes’ coaches. Part of the preparation was *physical*. Athletes discussed how their coaches emphasized the importance of staying in shape. A baseball pitcher noted that his coach was “big into the physical conditioning, but also the [mechanical] conditioning of your arm” (p15). Their coaches also prepared these athletes by running game-like practices. In fact, most participants described their “practices [as being] harder than the matches” (p7).

Another aspect of athlete preparation was *mental*. The athletes described a variety of activities their coaches implemented that mentally prepared them for competition. These included performance routines, focus, and mental rehearsal. As one athlete shared:

> He literally would lay me down on the ground on my back. So basically, you're laying on the ground and he'd have me start with the ball in my hand and he'd have me every time turn my head to the side to make sure that my elbow was through my eyes. Then I would close my eyes and he would tell me to visualize seeing myself on the mound throwing with the perfect mechanics. So that was like the first thing that I remember him doing and it's crazy to get back on the mound after doing this for a couple of days and then after a couple of weeks and seeing a huge difference already. (p15)

Athletes also talked about how their coaches prepared them by developing meticulous game plans. "Coach was very good at figuring out the tactics to stop an opponent. There is only so much you can do to execute a game plan but you knew that he had it all broken down, every last number. He had it calculated out" (p7). Their coaches also had these athletes study opponents. As one participant expressed, "We used to have to go through every single pitching chart from the game before on each hitter and highlight when they swung through a fastball... were they ahead or behind in the count" (p15).

Finally, these coaches prepared their athletes in a manner that was *consistent*. "Whether we were playing in front of 20,000 or 2,000 people, I don't think you saw a difference in his personality. He didn't prepare differently. His life didn't change. His actions didn't change" (p14). Everything was drawn out and we knew what we were going to do and how we were going to do it and we did it over and over and over again" (p10).

Respond to Athletes

The manner in which these coaches *responded to athlete behaviors and performance* emerged as another major theme within the dimension of *Coaching Actions.* Participants discussed how their coaches responded to athletes' effort, mistakes, emotions, and performance. Regardless of whether it was positive or negative, one athlete discussed why it was important to get a coach's response. "If the coach just stands there and watches, you never know if you're doing something right. It's nice for coaches to show a bit of emotion and not be so stoic that they can't be human as well" (p9). The three primary responses that these athletes said their coaches exhibited were excitement, enjoyment, and displeasure.

One of the factors that influenced their coaches' excitement was the athletes' excitement. As one athlete explained, "He got excited about things that he knew we got excited about" (p15). However, their coaches also got excited when players performed well. One volleyball player shared, "When somebody would make a great dig or a great hit or it was a great play, his face literally would light up and he would be the first person to say, 'That was a career dig!' Or, 'That was your best hit!'" (p13). A baseball player said, "Coach would get excited over little things. We had a couple of guys that were struggling to get hits and when they got a hit, he would jump off his seat. He used to get really excited about things like that" (p15). Most of these athletes described how their coaches got excited about factors associated with the process more often than with performance outcomes. "Coach didn't just get excited over the goals, but he got excited about a great defensive tackle or a defensive header... the things that were not glorious, but selfless" (p9). In addition to their excitement, these athletes' coaches also expressed

enjoyment when their players improved and/or developed. “If a player is better than he was a month ago, that made him happy. I think that’s where he got his enjoyment” (p14).

On the other hand, their coaches responded with displeasure when these athletes were goofing off, not paying attention, or being lazy. “Coach had zero patience for people who wouldn’t work hard and he made that very clear at the beginning that if you weren’t working hard that he would not hesitate to pull you out” (p12). Their coaches also responded negatively to mental mistakes. A baseball player quoted his coach who said, “Nobody wants to strike out. Nobody wants to make an error. I will never criticize you about that. Those things happen, but I will get upset if you make a mental mistake” (p2). When it came to physical mistakes, these athletes’ coaches were much more forgiving. “You had a margin of error. If you are playing your hardest, you are going to make mistakes, it’s inevitable” (p6). Several athletes discussed how their coaches encouraged aggressive play and wouldn’t take players out of the game or punish them for making physical errors. As a result, the athletes never worried or even concerned themselves with making mistakes. Instead, they were able to have fun and play relaxed.

Perform Under Pressure

While the focus in sport is primarily directed toward player performance, coaches are also performers of sorts. The participants in this study discussed how great coaches *performed under pressure.* This emerged as another major theme within the dimension of *Coaching Actions*. In pressure situations, the athletes described how their coaches remained confident, calm, and emotionally stable. This was nicely summarized in one basketball player’s account:

> [My coach's] true gift is that in the heat of the battle, she is the rock. Some coaches are emotional and want to win and forget to relax and execute, but my coach stayed calm and in the zone. She never blew up unless she wanted too. She never shows fear. She never shows her uneasiness or nervousness. Her communication is direct and to the point. She chooses her words wisely. Her voice is not soft, but loud and everything is matter of fact. She never does any sort of a call under pressure that the team hasn't seen 100 times. The more preparation, the less stressful you're going to be in pressure situations because you've already done the work. The key is that coach already had everything in the playbook. She never drew up a new play when the game was on the line. It was being able to pull out one more trick, but pulling out a trick that you already have. (p4)

Athletes described how they experienced a sense of calmness and comfort when their coaches maintained a high level of poise under pressure. "Having the coach be more of a steady figure gave the whole team a comfort level to know that it was never going to get out of control. I think it really kind of calmed my mind" (p6).

Disregard the Irrelevant

These athletes expressed how their coaches showed disregard for anything that was irrelevant to the team's primary objectives. This emerged as another major theme within *Coaching Actions.* Great coaches focus on achieving goals and spend less time worrying about how they are obtained. "If you were over 30, you conditioned in your own way. You're old enough to know what you need to do to stay in shape to be able to

play and you're going to do it" (p1). "If you missed a flight, your ticket was at the gate and there was no bologna" (p7). "If you lose a drill [in practice], you lose a drill and move on. It was self motivated and there was no punishment for drills because nobody needed to convince anybody that losing was bad, everybody knew it" (p7). These athletes described their coaches as being able to see the big picture. As a result, they "would let the little things go sometimes" (p6). A volleyball player said, "He didn't care one iota about how you dressed, whether you were shaven or unshaven, if you had long hair or short hair, or if you wore a bandanna. Nothing mattered to him, but how you played the game" (p7).

Influences

Influences emerged as the final major dimension representing athlete experiences of great coaching. Ultimately, athletes were influenced by the interaction between *Coach Attributes, The Environment, The System, Relationships,* and *Coaching Actions*. While the impact of coaching actions was mediated by the content, method, and quality of delivery, all other dimensions served as the background that *influenced* athlete experiences. The participants in this study described how playing for great coaches was about "more than just becoming a better athlete, but also becoming a better person" (p3). Their coaches influenced the athletes' self-perceptions, development, and performance. Most importantly, they influenced the athletes' desire and ability to become the best that they could be, not only in sport but also in life.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Coaches have a tremendous impact on the lives of their athletes both on and off the playing field. To determine what makes some coaches more effective than others, previous research has examined topics such as leadership, decision-making, and coaching behaviors (e.g., Bloom, et al., 1999; Chelladurai & Quek, 1995; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995). To date, most studies have relied on coaching success (i.e., win loss records) to define effectiveness. While a winning record may indicate that a coach is effective, it may not mean that a coach is great. In this study an attempt was made to expand on previous literature by examining athlete experiences of great coaching. By focusing on athlete experiences rather than on any specific aspect of coaching, the results provided a more comprehensive picture of the factors that underlie coaching greatness.

Major Findings

The results of in-depth phenomenological interviews with 18 former elite level athletes revealed six major dimensions representing the essence of great coaching: *Coach Attributes, The Environment, The System, Relationships, Coaching Actions*, and *Influences*. The interaction between these dimensions (illustrated in Figure 1 on page 32) is perhaps one of the most significant findings that emerged in this study. Once a strong coach-athlete relationship is established and athletes understand their coach, the environment, and the system, these dimensions serve as constants in the background of athlete experiences, much like the scenery serves as the background for a play. When the

curtains are drawn, audience attention is focused on the lighting, sounds, and stage props. Once the play begins, attention shifts to the actors; however, all of the elements in the backdrop contribute to the impact of the performance on the viewer. In athlete experiences, coaching actions and influences take center stage but the other dimensions continue to impact the athlete's experience. Thus, it might be suggested that the ability to maintain a stable interaction between these dimensions is a major factor that elevates certain coaches to the status of greatness.

The athletes in this study described their coaches' attributes, the environment, the system, and relationships as *consistent* throughout their experience. Their coaches acted the same whether they were on or off the field. They were consistent in every aspect of coaching whether it was the way they managed personnel, ran their system, prepared for games, or communicated with athletes. As a result, these athletes knew exactly what to expect from their coaches. The stability they experienced in terms of their coaches' attributes, the environment, the system, and relationships allowed the athletes to focus on what was most important; their coaches' actions and how those actions influenced their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

The dimensions that comprised the background of these athletes' experiences only became figural when there was a lack of stability or consistency. This signified a breakdown in the coaching process because athletes became pre-occupied with factors that detracted from their learning and performance. For example, an athlete who is unsure of his or her relationship with the coach might be distracted from the key elements of preparation and play. This became evident when athletes compared their experiences of

great coaches with experiences of coaches that were less than great. It appears that great coaches avoid this situation by maintaining stability across all background dimensions.

Another significant finding that emerged in this study was contained in the dimension of *Coaching Actions*. It is common knowledge that all coaches teach on some level. Great coaches teach the details. All coaches communicate. Great coaches communicate honestly. All coaches prepare. Great coaches prepare meticulously. All coaches develop expectations. Great coaches develop high expectations and do everything within their power to help athletes achieve them. Greatness is not about what coaches do, but rather *how* they do it. It is the *content*, *method*, and *quality* of their actions and interactions that sets great coaches apart from the rest.

Connections with Previous Research

Previous research has examined the influence of coaching behaviors on athletes' self-perceptions and performance (Allen & Howe, 1998; Black & Weiss, 1992; Chelladurai, 1984; Dwyer & Fisher, 1990; Garland & Barry, 1990; Riemer & Chelladurai). The results generally suggest that higher levels of athlete satisfaction are associated with greater frequencies of training and instruction, social support, positive feedback, and democratic decision-making (Allen & Howe, 1998; Black & Weiss, 1992; Chelladurai, 1984; Dwyer & Fisher, 1990). Although athlete satisfaction might appear to be important, it did not emerge as a factor in the present study of athlete experiences of great coaching. Therefore, future researchers might examine the influence of coaching behaviors on other factors such as athletes' respect, trust, and belief in their coach.

Previous research also suggests that coaching behaviors can influence athletes' perceptions of competence (Allen & Howe, 1998; Horn, 1985). However, the results have not been consistent. For example, when coaches provide encouragement and informational feedback following unsuccessful performances, some athletes have been found to experience higher levels of competence, while others have experienced lower levels of competence (Allen & Howe, 1998; Black & Weiss, 1992). One explanation for these discrepant outcomes is that coaching behaviors were examined independently of contextual factors. In the present study, coach attributes, the environment, the system, and relationships were found to be an important background for coaching actions and influences. Therefore, future researchers are advised to examine the influence of coaching behaviors in light of these contextual factors.

One of the major dimensions representing athletes' experiences of great coaching in the present study was *Coach Attributes*. This dimension consisted of athletes' perceptions of their coaches' core qualities. One of the sub-themes that emerged within this dimension was personality. To date, research on personality has primarily focused on athletes and virtually ignored coaches. A review of the literature revealed that only a handful of studies have addressed coach personality over the past four decades (e.g., Cheng & Wu, 1987; Frederick & Morrison, 1999; Hendry, 1969). Thus far, a common personality profile for successful coaches does not exist (Hendry, 1969). However, the athletes in this study frequently described their coaches as being passionate, caring, honest, and loyal among other qualities. In a study of Olympic athlete experiences, coaches were viewed as possessing many of these same characteristics (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 1999). Taken together, there might still be some truth to Bruce

Ogilvie's assumption "that top class coaches do possess certain qualities in their psychological make-up which distinguishes them from other coaches" (Hendry, 1969, p. 303). The present findings suggest the potential for revitalizing personality research on coaches. While self-report measures represent one of the most common methods used to assess personality, future researchers might examine coach characteristics from the athletes' perspective. Additionally, there might be some benefits to developing a measure of coach personality that is sport specific.

Practical Implications

The results of this study offer several implications for coaching education. First, they suggest that coaches who aspire to greatness continually develop themselves and their knowledge of the sport that they are coaching. The athletes in this study described their coaches as experts who were constantly learning and bringing that information back to the team. Staying current would help any coach adapt to the changes that occur in his/her sport over time. Continuing education would also help coaches implement a system of strategies and techniques that serve to maximize their athletes' strengths.

Second, the results suggest that great coaches create an environment that is athlete centered. By doing that, coaches can help their athletes achieve their potential both on and off the playing field. Some strategies that coaches might implement to achieve this task are listed below:

- Showing a genuine interest in players not only as athletes, but also as people. This could mean taking the time to ask athletes about their families, learn

something about athletes' hobbies outside of sport, or make sure athletes are doing well in school.

- Ensuring that all athletes feel valued regardless of whether they are starters or non-starters. Emphasizing the contributions of those who get fewer opportunities to play in games.
- Empowering athletes by providing them with opportunities to get involved in various aspects of the coaching process. This might include making decisions on certain issues such as uniforms, practice schedules, or team rules.
- Defining high and achievable expectations for ALL athletes. Clearly communicating these expectations and put time, energy, and effort into helping athletes achieve them.
- Focusing on athletes' strengths and providing them with specific information to improve on their weaknesses. Great coaches don't just tell athletes what they did wrong; they tell them how to fix it.
- Communicating honestly. Great coaches don't tell athletes what they think athletes want to hear. They tell them the truth, even when it hurts.
- Providing unconditional support. Great coaches are available, but also approachable. They establish a genuine open door policy. Rather than waiting for athletes to come, great coaches invite them in.
- Treating athletes fairly. Great coaches make fair decisions, give all athletes a chance to earn playing time, and apply the rules uniformly to all players.
- Caring about individuals as players, but more importantly as people.

Coaches who aspire to be great need to make an effort to get to know their players and allow their players to get to know them. This will help their athletes know what the coach expects of them, both on and off the field. In short, great coaches provide athletes with individualized treatment. The previous strategies have the potential to help coaches establish strong relationships with their players, both professionally and personally. In addition, they should help coaches gain their athletes' trust and respect. The results of the present study suggest that coaches who do this are more likely to have athletes who will listen attentively, work hard, and reach their potential.

Finally, the results suggest that great coaches create a vision and determine what is most important for achieving that vision. They maintain consistency throughout all aspects of their coaching (e.g., the environment, the system, relationships) and disregard factors that are irrelevant. This allows athletes to focus on what is most relevant to their development and performance. As previously mentioned, great coaches assume in a variety of roles that go beyond the playing field. They are important figures that impact the lives of their athletes. The present results suggest that coaches who implement these strategies will more likely provide sport participants with the positive experiences that they desire and deserve.

Future Directions

The results of this study provide a strong foundation for additional research on coaching. The dimensions representing athlete experiences of great coaching that emerged in this study could be examined in more detail by obtaining information from the perspective of coaches. While this study focused on team sport athletes, it might also

be beneficial to determine the applicability of these results to athletes participating in individual sports. Future studies might further examine the content, method, and quality of coaching actions such as teaching, motivating, and preparing athletes. The present results might also promote the development of an instrument for evaluating various aspects of coaching greatness. Finally, future studies might be designed to test the efficacy of the coaching model that emerged from athlete experiences of great coaching obtained in this study.

Conclusion

The athlete participants in this study experienced great coaching at all levels of sport including youth, high school, club, collegiate, and professional. They also described great coaches that were both male and female. These findings reinforce the notion that great coaching is not solely determined on the basis of win-loss records or media attention. When asked to discuss their experiences, the current participants provided their own definitions of greatness, which in their own way suggest the following conclusions about what makes a great coach. Thus, based on the present results, it might be concluded that:

- Great coaches are teachers and those lessons transcend whatever sport you're playing. As accomplished as some coaches may be statistically in terms of wins and losses, I think that's not the true definition of greatness. It's only a component of it. You can't be great if your teams always stink and never win. Winning is the fundamental goal of competition, but it's not the be all end all. I think great coaching should be measured on the yield you get out of the

players you have. Success should be defined as how well you did against your potential. You might have a great coach who brought a team that had zero victories the year before up to 500 victories with the same material and you have to think, '[That coach] really made a difference.' The definition of great coaching would be getting your players to achieve their potential whether they are the Bad News Bears or the Los Angeles Lakers. (p17)

- Most people correlate a great coach with what they produce as far as [win loss-records], but obviously there is much more to it and I believe that a lot of it is how much you can pull out of your players (p6)
- You can pretty much be dumb as a box of rocks and probably still win. I think getting the most out of what you have is what made my coach great. He basically squeezed blood out of a turnip. (p15)

The participants in this study defined great coaching as the ability to maximize athlete potential. However, the true essence of this phenomenon was captured in their descriptions of who their coaches were, what they did, how they did it, and how it influenced them. Ultimately, these athletes experienced individuals who were not only great coaches, but extraordinary people who left lasting impressions on the lives of those who were fortunate enough to call them "coach."

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter of Invitation

Dear [Athlete's Name],

My name is Andrea Becker and I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee. For my dissertation, I am conducting a research study on athlete experiences of great coaching and am inviting you to participate. The criteria to participate in this study are as follows:

- You must have been a member of an NCAA Division I, international, or professional level athletic team:
  - Soccer
  - Volleyball
  - Basketball
  - Baseball
  - Lacrosse
  - Football
  - Softball
  - Any other team sport
- You must have experienced great coaching (at least one coach you perceived as great) at some level throughout the course of your sport career:
  - Youth
  - High school
  - Club
  - College
  - Professional
  - Any other competitive level
- You must be willing to openly discuss your experiences of great coaching

If you meet the above criteria and are willing to contribute to this research endeavor, you will be asked to participate in an audio-taped interview that will last approximately 30-60 minutes (or as long as you are willing to talk). Interviews will be scheduled at a convenient location that is quiet and private. You will be asked to share your experiences of great coaching.

If you choose to participate, please contact me and we will arrange an interview at a time that is convenient for you. If you have questions, feel free to contact me at any time. I thank you in advance for your time and consideration in advancing this research.

Sincerely,

Andrea Becker

APPENDIX B

Flyer of Invitation

Attention Athletes…



Are you an athlete that:

- Has been a member of an NCAA Division I, international, or professional level athletic sport team (i.e., soccer, volleyball, basketball, baseball, softball, field hockey, football, etc.)
- Has experienced **GREAT** coaching at some point throughout the course of your sport career (i.e., youth, high school, college, professional, etc.)
- Is not a current coach
- Is willing to do an interview about your experiences of great coaching

If So, Please Contact:

Primary Contact:
Andrea Becker
Phone: (XXX) XXX – XXXX
E-mail: abecker5@utk.edu

Local Contact:
Andrea Becker
Phone: (XXX) XXX - XXXX

Andrea Becker is a current doctoral student at the University of Tennessee. She is conducting a total of 20 interviews for her doctoral dissertation on athletes' experiences of great coaching. Your contributions to this research have the potential to positively influence the quality of coaching education and the experiences of future athletes. This research has been approved by the University of Tennessee.



Andrea Becker

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to explore coaching greatness. The primary purpose is to gain an understanding of your experiences of great coaching. As a participant in this study, you will be asked to engage in an audio-taped interview that may last approximately 60-90 minutes in length. Once your interview is transcribed, the audiotape will be destroyed. To protect your confidentiality, your transcript will be identified with a pseudonym (false name).

While this study will not result in direct benefits to you or your team, the information gleaned from your participation will contribute to the advancement of research on coaching. The information gleaned from this study may also serve to enhance the quality of coach education and training. This has the potential to positively influence the experiences of future sport participants.

Your participation in this study will remain **confidential**. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that may reveal your individual identity without your formal consent.

If you have any questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the primary researcher, Andrea J. Becker, at (865) 974-0601 or abecker5@utk.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Research Compliance Services section of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I may refuse to participate without penalty. If I decide to participate, I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which I am are otherwise entitled. If I withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, my data will be returned to me or destroyed.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D

Sample Interview

The following sample is an interview with a 22 year old male baseball player. To ensure the participant's anonymity, names and places were replaced with psuedonyms throughout the transcript. The letter "I" represents the interviewer, while "P" represents the participant.

I: Why don't you just go ahead and tell me about your experiences of great coaching…

P: This was my first full season in professional baseball. So it's a big adjustment going from playing 65 games in college to 141 games in 50 days. So you're playing every single day so you kind of lose the adrenaline rush I guess a little bit as far as getting excited to play every day. When you're in college, you're playing on the weekends… Friday, Saturday, Sunday… so you're looking forward to it all week. But when you're playing every day it's easy to kind of get… not really bored with it, but to lose that drive to go out there and work hard every day. So I think it was important to have somebody who you enjoy playing for to kind of go out there and not only are you working for yourself, but you're working for somebody that is ultimately trying to do the same thing as we are. We're trying to go to the big leagues, he's trying to get to the big leagues, but he really cares about us and he's out there creating a lot of energy and just being upbeat and not a drag to play for. I mean, it is a grind playing 150 games or 141 games. So when somebody comes in and is able to kind of loosen it up a little bit, kind of loosen the atmosphere and have a good time, but still get his guys to work hard, I think that's really helpful. He's one of those guys that would get in your face if he needed too. You know, you go out there and make a bonehead play and lose the game the night before, he'll get into you a little bit after the game and tell you what you need to be told, but he'll come back the next day and it's like it never happened. You know it's, 'How's it going?' He's the first person to say something to you. He just moves by it. So it's nice to have the… you gotta have the constructive criticism, but you don't want to have a guy that's just going to continually bang on you until to you wear down. Because when you are around 25-30 guys for that amount of time, you get tired of everybody (laughs). So that was important I think… to have kind of the lighthearted attitude on one side and then still be able to I wouldn't say punish, but constructively criticize you when need be.

I: Can you give an example of how he would use criticism?

P: Sure, one of his big things was always respecting the game. He played in the big leagues for, I would say, ten years and made quite a bit of money doing it. So he just had

this thing and he's like, "We're going to respect the game. I don't care if you go out there and make an error, you throw a ball away, you strike out with bases loaded or whatever… I'll never get on you for that." It's not playing the game hard is when he comes down on you. And he had a thing, he called it a hard 90. If you didn't run hard to first base, no matter what… if you popped out to the shortstop or you grounded out to the shortstop or hit a fly ball… whatever it was, all he asked for is you to run hard. And I don't know if you've watched a whole lot of major league baseball, but that is very common. Most guys when they hit a ground ball, they jog to first base and they get thrown out by 40 feet. And I think that kind of just trickled down through all of baseball from the minor leagues to college to even little league. So one day I came out there and bases were loaded and I popped out and I ran… I ran hard out of the box and got to about first base and rounded first base and a guy is standing in the outfield and it's coming right down at him… never happens… people don't drop fly balls (laughs). So I shut it down like right as it comes down and sure enough it hits off the bottom of his glove and drops down and I don't go to second base, I'm still standing on first base. You know, and he took me out of the game and that was his thing, he always takes you out of the game. He probably took out 15 players throughout the year… You know, never embarrassed you. He wouldn't yell at you. He wouldn't say anything to you when you were doing it, but he would come in and say send somebody else in. And then after the game he would say, "Look, I told you this from the beginning. This is unacceptable to me and that's one of the few things that I ask you to do." So you know, he takes you out of the game. Obviously, you don't want to come out of the game, but the next day he comes up and it was just something new. So it was like it never happened.

I: So it sounds to me like he's hard on you when you're not going hard or he… not punishes you, but he takes you out of the game if you're not going hard. Would he take you out of the game for those other types mistakes that you were talking about?

P: Never… the thing he described is he said, "Everybody here has a dream to play in the big leagues. Nobody wants to strike out. Nobody wants to make an error. So I'll never criticize you about that. Those things happen. I mean, baseball is a game of failure. If you hit .300, you're failing 7 out of 10 times." So he's really good about letting that stuff go. When he gets upset was if you made a mental mistake… if you weren't paying attention or you missed a sign or whatever it may be… just mentally, you weren't going hard. That was kind of his pet peeve I guess. But it was always good though because he never carried it over. It's not like, you screw up the first game… Our second baseman, the first game of the year, his first at bat, he kind of didn't bust it out of the box and got taken out and you're thinking… "This is the first game of the year. You know, this is going to carry on a grudge match all year." But it was never like that. He always was just able to get over it and the next day was like it never happened.

I: So he let you know that it wasn't what he expected, but then that was it…

P: Yeah, that was the end of it. He would say what he had to say and then you know, get his point across.

I: You also said at the beginning that he cares and he creates energy, can you talk a little bit more about that?

P: Yeah, I mean we would have… I don't know if you've been around like a baseball situation, but there's… for a 7:00 game, we'll get to the field about 2:00 and we'll be on the field by 2:30 doing early work as far as bunt defenses or pop fly reads and just little things like that, which in 100 degree weather in August is not what everybody wants to be doing especially after you've played 100 games. But he was always out there laughing, joking around, having a good time, always upbeat… and I think that carries over to the guys because he knows that that's not what we want to do. At that time of the year, everybody is just drained. You know, you're trying to make it through to the end of the season and being out there at 2:30 doing bunt defenses is not what you feeling like doing. So having somebody out there that is not going to be just dry and like going through the motions, I think it carries throughout our team. Just looking back at some of the players that have come through our system that have now moved up or have been released or played in the big leagues… whatever it's been… I think consistently every year, he's gotten more out of his players than is expected. I think that… like this year, we were basically told… I mean, obviously they didn't tell us as players, but it was kind of a rumor that everybody heard that our team wasn't supposed to be very good. We didn't have… you know, we were really young for that level of minor league baseball and we weren't expected to do a whole lot. You know, we got off to a slow start and kind of did what everybody expected us too. By the end of the year, we won the second half and we made it all the way to the championship series and we ended up losing, but I don't think anybody would have thought that at the beginning of the year. So I think that consistently, he gets more out of his players because guys care about him. We want to win not only for ourselves, but for him. And he subsequently just got promoted to Triple A. So he'll be a Triple A coach next year. I mean, I would be shocked if in a couple years, he didn't end up somewhere in the big leagues.

I: What makes you want to play for him?

P: Just you… you can feel that he cares about you. It's not like one of those things… some managers are out there and it's probably hard to believe, but they are completely out there for themselves. Like, I don't want to be in the minor leagues anymore. I mean, that's a tough life to live making barely any money… guys just don't want to be minor league managers. That's not the ultimate goal. They go through the same thing we do because they want to be in the big leagues and you got to work your way up. So you can see that in some guys. It's kind of like that's all it's about. But with him, he truly cares about his guys and just the way that he goes about his business, you can tell that and you can feel it. It may not be something that he says or whatever, but just the way that he handles his guys. He always comes up, you know, before you get there and pats you on the back, "Hey, what's going on?" Just joking around or whatever it is. It just gives you that sense that he cares about more than just winning and wants you guys, his individual players, to succeed. So I think that just… that's what really drives everybody to play hard for him. If you can get kind of that balance between somebody that will come down on

you and somebody that you really like as person, that's a good kind of balance I guess. You have a lot of coaches that just want to use everything as negative. I mean, everything is negative. If you're hitting .400, you know, he's calling you in there… "Why didn't you hit .420? Why don't you have 30 homeruns?" You know, everything is like bad, bad, bad, bad… Um… and some guys that works for, but I would say that for the vast majority, that doesn't fly really well. And that's okay to have a negative kind of points when you're saying things sometimes, but it just can't be… there's got to be a balance. Because if you do, then nobody cares about winning for the coach or they are just out there for themselves or out there for the guys that they're playing with, which it does make a big difference when you care about who you're playing for…

I: Is there anything else that stands out to you?

P: I think one of the things… This is probably just relative to baseball more than other sports, but in baseball there's a vast… I mean, there's a lot of different cultures. There's a lot of Latin guys from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, Cuba… I mean, from all over… Mexico… and I mean, you have guys from Japan and over there in the far east… but he spoke two languages. He's actually from Mexico, but speaks English and speaks Spanish very well. And we have… in low minor leagues, there's probably close to 40% of the guys are Latin guys. So I think that helps… the language barrier really helps him relate to both sides because we'll go through meetings in spring training where our minor league coordinator, who is just the head of minor league development, will have a meeting and he'll talk for 10 minutes and we'll stop for 10 minutes and have somebody translate it in Spanish. And you can just imagine when you're sitting there for an hour and half of it you have no idea what's going on. So I think that's something that kind of distinguishes him. I think for anybody in baseball, that would be very useful, but especially as a manager because you are trying to relate to all of your guys as much as you possibly can.

I: So relating to the guys is important for you?

P: Oh absolutely. It's hard to… that's a very good point. It's hard to play for somebody that has never gone through what you're going through. Um… you know, like our coach in college didn't play college baseball. He didn't go through those things. He didn't… You know, it's hard to play for a guy in professional baseball that's never gone through a minor league season and sat on a bench for 10 hours from 7:00 at night until 7:00 in the morning and then try to play that night. It's not an easy thing to do. And for somebody who doesn't understand that, they're like, "Why are you sore getting off the bus? Why are you not doing this? Why are you not doing that?" He kind of understands that it's a grind. That's the best way to describe it. So I think it's really important for somebody to have experience of what you've gone through so you can ask him questions not only just as far as like mechanical things in your swing, but "Hey, you know, this pitcher has done this 5 times in a row now or just changing the sequence, what's something that I can look for? What would you do?"… because they've been in the game for 10-15 years and that

experience I think is helpful because not all advice wise, but just knowing what you're going through day in and day out… I think is important.

I: You also talked about earlier about how his energy carries over on to the team. Can you talk more about that?

P: Yeah, at the end… I don't know if you have ever heard… in August baseball is called the dog days of August. By that time, you've played 120 games. Everybody is just worn out physically and mentally. You're just trying to get through more than anything. Obviously you want to win, but it's tough at that time of year. So when you have a guy that's bouncing around in the dugout and is encouraging and is always saying something and never just standing in the corner with his line-up card just watching the game…. Um… it does carry over and guys see that and guys get a little bit more into the game. You know, guys are rooting for other guys a little bit more, pulling for guys… just because it is… it's like the way… like, you get a couple guys going and then everybody gets going. And it all starts with… for us, it all started with our manager. Sometimes you'll see it with guys on the team. You'll have a couple of vocal leaders and they'll kind of carry everybody. But I think if you can have that from a manager that's just a lot better, that's a lot better.

I: So far you've talked about… in your experience what's been important for you is that he cares. He has this energy that carries over. He gets guys to work hard and want to play for him because he cares and that kind of thing… um… relating to the players. Being able to relate to them in different ways and language happened to be one of them…

P: Yeah

I: Um… experience was another one… going through those things and that kind of thing… understanding is important and then uh… He criticizes lack of effort, not necessarily lack of skill or whatever… Is there anything else that stands out for you?

P: I just think that… I guess another thing that is important is the way that he relates with… not just the players, but with the entire organization. I think that he has a very, very, very high opinion of him amongst not only like the GM of our… of the Diamond Busters, but the GM of the Pirates. You know, he works well with the guys that are around… like we go out and do community service, we go out and do things like that and our GM there would have dinner for us in the Diamond Club after the game sometimes. And he had a really good relationship with those guys and I think when everybody is getting along well… you know, the GM is on the same page as the manager. The manager gets along with players and the entire front office. I mean, it's kind of hard to describe if you've never been in a minor league club house, but it's kind of a close knit group. You know, because a lot of the people that are working there are younger. Younger people are working that are close to our age. So we go out and hang out after and do whatever. So he had a really really good relationship with everybody there and I think that was important because we got things that plenty of other places that you play

don't get. Very few people will open up the Diamond Club after the game, which is just a restaurant slash bar type of thing and give us food a couple times a week and things like that. Because you're making… I mean, this year in minor league baseball, I made $1,200 a month, which is awful (laughs) working 7 days a week basically. You know, 8… 9… hour days and you're not making a whole lot of money. So any extra effort that they make to do that… and I think the reason that they do that is because they have such a good relationship. And then I guess from the other side with the people that are making the decisions within the organization as far as the scouts and the major league personnel, I think they really value his opinion. When he says something, they listen. If he says, "This guy is going to go out there and play hard every day. He can hit. He can run. He can field." or plus tools… whatever it maybe… they listen. Some managers, it's like yeah whatever. They'll send in their advanced scouts to go in and look at guys, but when you have somebody that you play with day in and day out, they get a much better view of what type of player you are. Because a scout can come in for a day or even a series of 4 games and watch you, but you might just suck that weekend. That's how baseball is. I mean, there are plenty of times when you don't do well. So it's nice to have somebody that they trust who sees you all season. He sees you through the good and the bad. So he can kind of give a little bit more accurate picture because baseball is… we call it a marathon, not a sprint. I mean, you can't worry about the… I mean, you're going to have 5 games where you're not doing good and you're going to have 5 games where you're awesome. It's not about that. It's about the whole body of work. So it's important to have somebody that can see you through that entire thing to be able to recognize it and do things for you that way…

I: Uh hmm… You've been talking a lot about how important the relationship is and as a player for you in your experience… what does that relationship mean to you?

P: Well, it was awesome. I mean, when I was leaving and we were saying our goodbyes, it was really emotional. It was… because you know that there's a good chance that you won't ever play for him again. You know, you'll see him around and things in spring training, but you know that it's very rare that you're going to get to have a manager like that. So the times that you do, you have to take advantage of it and you're sorry to see it end. So it will be one of those things where if I needed to come… like today… if I had something that I had… whether it was about baseball or whether it was about something off the field or if I needed something… you know, even if he couldn't do it… I could call him right now and he would do everything he possibly could. And I think for as long as we're both around, it would be like that. Even if I wasn't playing baseball… if he was a big league manager and I was selling insurance somewhere, I think I could call him up and just see what's going on because he's a great person. I think that great people make great coaches. So that's something I think that is special in a relationship that you don't get very often.

I: And playing for that… what's that like?

P: Oh, it's awesome. I mean, it's… you know, you have a lot of pressure on yourself to go out there and get things done because you're trying to make the big leagues ultimately. But when you're playing for a winning team and you're playing with guys that want to win and the whole club has a good attitude, which I think starts from the top… I think that just makes it easier. It's tough to hate what you're doing and be good at it. You don't see a lot of guys in the big leagues that are on bad teams that are having career years. That just doesn't happen. You know, most of the guys that are having career years are on pretty good football teams or basketball teams or baseball teams… whatever it is… and you know, you don't see a lot of guys that are miserable. You know, like Alan Iverson is demanding out of Philly and stuff like that. I mean, that's… it's just typical. I mean, if you're not happy, you're not going to play to the best of your ability because there's too many other things going on. You want to have your entire responsibility to focus on playing the game. You don't want to have to worry about… you're not happy with your contract, you're not happy with whatever it may be, you're not happy with your playing time… whatever it is. I think that is a big help.

I: So having that kind of relationship makes you a happier player?

P: Yeah, I think it fosters… it helps… It's just one thing that you don't have to worry about. I mean, there's just so many things. Maybe not quite as much in the minor leagues, but when you're in the big leagues, you have your contract stuff and your agent stuff and you have so many things you have to worry about. You know, you get traded and you're moving your family across the country. I mean, there's just a lot of things going on that um… that's just one piece of the puzzle that if you don't have to worry about makes it a lot easier.

I: You were saying that great people make great coaches and he was a great person to you. What was it that…

P: Well, you could just tell by… I mean, he had an awesome family. Like his son was a high school kid, but he would come down and hit BP with us on the field. Nicest kid in the world, but you could just see the way he cared for his son so much that it like just carried over. And when you see somebody that you envy as a person off the field, you know, they'd go to war with you if you had too. I mean, it's nice to see that and you have guys off the field that have all sorts of problems. And not necessarily making them a bad person, but you see somebody that looks like they have things in line… they do things, what you think, are the right way… that makes it a whole lot easier to respect them coming in and then when you see them on the field acting the way they are and then you see them off the field doing the same kind of things… I think that kind of carries over I guess…

I: So for you, one of the important things is the consistency between the on the field coach person and the off the field person?

P: Yeah, yeah… I've had a lot of coaches in the past… especially now… it's funny because when I was playing… you know, I'm playing professional baseball now and I come back and see my coaches from the past and all the sudden they want to be my best friend. But when I was playing with them, they didn't want to be my best friend. Everything was negative… you gotta do this, you gotta do that… um… it's hard to respect that. It's like… why wasn't it like this… you don't have to be… there's nothing in any coaching book that says you have to be hated by your players to be a good coach. You have to have discipline sometimes, but that doesn't mean that you can't have a good relationship and you can't be friends in the right way. And when you're… when you see a change… say you come back and you see somebody, it's just like… why is that… that doesn't need to be.

I: In your experiences of playing baseball and you've played a lot obviously… are there any other experiences of great coaching that stand out to you?

P: I had a great coach from my high school time… not at my high school, but in the club team that I played for. Because playing baseball in Utah, you don't get a whole lot of opportunities as far as college or professional… just with the high school. So you have to play on a team that travels around… like we would go to Arizona. We would go to Florida and play in these big tournaments and we had a coach who was very very knowledgeable, but he didn't have the people personality I guess. So it was one of those things where he was very knowledgeable and sometimes he was the best coach you ever thought you had and then sometimes you were like what in the world is going on. I mean, just made some bad decisions whether financing or team or whatever it may be. You know, so he was great as far as the baseball stuff, but off the field he was kind of… and not only just off the field, but in the way he communicated with his players. He'd come down hard. You know, harder I think than necessary and sometimes at any time I think if you belittle a player, that's going over the line. There's no need for that. That doesn't need to be done. You can crack down on somebody pretty hard without dropping names or whatever it may be. So I think… I guess that would be another common trait… is just the knowledge of what you're doing. I really didn't bring that up, but that's kind of I guess the obvious trait that you have to have. If you don't know what you're doing then you're not going to be very good at it. So something that sticks out when you see somebody that really has a good grasp on what's going on…

I: So having a good knowledge of the game is important for you in a great coach…

P: And I think that even… I guess going to the next step on that… um… you want somebody that's going to continue to learn. That doesn't think that they have all of the answers. Like, you know… you have some guys that are pretty good, but if you look at a 1950 baseball swing and you look at a 2005 baseball swing, it doesn't look anything alike. And that's because the knowledge of the game has gone up so much, just the efficiency and the movement and things like that are so much better now then they were back then. You know, you gotta have somebody that's willing to say, "Look, I don't have all of the answers. This is the way that I know how to do it, but maybe there's a better

way out there." And not being so prideful that you can't admit that. And not saying, "This is the one and only way to do it." Because there are… in baseball… there's a lot of different ways to get things done. You know, there are some things that you have to do that every good player does, but you look at peoples' swings and you have guys that are standing wide open and you have guys with their hands straight up in the air… I mean, you have completely different batting stances and swings. I mean, that proves right there that there's not one way that it has to be done. So to have somebody that will be flexible and smart enough that they'll go out there and look for a better way to do it is something that… always searching for that next thing that is going to help their guys out. That's another thing…

I: Did your coaches that you thought were great do those things?

P: Yeah… oh yeah… there's nothing better for me I guess than when I go to a coach and say, "Hey, this is what's going on." Or I ask them a question and they're like, "I really don't know, I'll find out for you though." That's just… it's good because nobody has all of the answers. I don't care if you invented baseball. You don't know what every single answer to every situation. So when somebody will be like honest with you and say, "You know, I'm not sure. I'll check into that." I think that kind of is nice to see as a player because you don't have all of the answers and you know that and you're kind of lowering yourself to go in to ask a question. A lot of guys don't like to do that. So when somebody or the coach is like, "Let me find out for you. Let me see what I can do." You know, it just makes you feel good and it makes you feel like they're not just… that they have this complex that they have to know everything. You know, they really are there to help you not just make themselves look good…

I: So what is it that's nice about that for you as a player?

P: Just because it kind of makes you feel like… it makes you relate to them a little more because you feel like they're still growing too. It's not like… even thought they've been there and done what you've done, they probably haven't experienced going through the exact same thing that you have. Most of the times though good coaches will have the answers, but sometimes something comes up and they don't. So to have somebody that's willing to admit that and not putting themself way up here (holds hand above head)… you know, acting like they're standing on the throne is nice to see because everybody out there is doing the same thing. I guess one of the things that stood out that my coach this year in Lake View said was he's like, "This game is about you. It's not about me. When I was playing the game was about the players, not about the coaches." And I think there's something to be said for that because obviously you can't… if you don't have the personnel to get something done, then you don't have it. I mean, the coach can't do everything. Sooner or later the players are have to go out and perform. So the sooner or later a coach realizes that and doesn't try to be the center of attention… you know, the main attraction. I guess that's a good thing. Because there are a lot of coaches that want to be the head honcho and want all of the attention going to him. I mean, you could just tell by the way that he talked to the press and things like that… you know… he's always

hyping up his guys saying, “Look, you know… he did a great job tonight.” Or even if it was a pitcher on the other team when we got beat… you know… “He did a great job tonight. He just beat us. He was better than we were tonight.” You know, somebody that’s willing to give credit where credit is due is nice… There’s probably not a whole lot of coaches that would say, “I made a great move” to the press. Yeah like… “that was a perfect pinch hit at the perfect time” but guys feel like that. No matter what a coaching move is, it doesn’t matter what you do or what the coach does until the player goes out and performs what he asked him to do…

I: So one of the things that made these coaches great was that they didn’t try to be the center of attention?

P: Yeah, it was just about the players. You know, they were there and they were going to do everything they possibly could to help the players, but when it comes down to it, it’s the player that that plays the game not the coach… um… preparation and things like that are where the coach helps out, but you know… there are small situations where a coach can make a difference in the a game whether it be pinch hitting somebody or pinch running or making a pitching change or whatever it is… but it all comes down to the guys on the field. So it’s nice to see… have somebody that realizes that… that doesn’t have to head honcho…

I: And as a player when the coach says something like that to you… what is that like to you?

P: As far as saying what?

I: Saying that it’s about you guys out there…

P: Oh… okay… Yeah, it makes you feel good because he realizes right away that this is… he’s going to do what he can for you, but it just makes the guys respect him because they know that he’s thinking about them more than he’s thinking about himself. You know, that’s why guys… it’s funny cause you see the guys that feel that way that are putting their players first are the guys that make it to the big leagues in the end. And the guys that are putting themselves first and all they care about is making the big leagues… you know… those are the guys that never make it because players don’t want to play for a coach like that… and for some reason it’s harder…. You know guys don’t pick up on that… I guess that’s just human nature… that doesn’t happen a whole lot… you know, everything’s about me the whole time. So the guys that put their players ahead of them and do everything they can for the players are the guys that you know, in the end, get the better results for themselves.

I: Um… I guess I’ll just kind of go through and summarize a couple things and see if there is anything else that you have to say…

P: Okay

I: Um… you first talked about how much caring is important and developing that relationship between the players and there's different ways of doing that… and um… you talked about relating and understanding and having the experiences to be able to relate and understand players… you talked about great people… not just a great coaching, but they're great people and there's consistency. A great coach is the same person whether they are on the field or whether they are off the field. They don't try to put themselves as the center of attention. They're not trying to take the attention away from the players. It's about the players. And they are willing to learn and continue to learn in order to help the players and that's what a great coach means to you. Criticism if they give it is not about errors that are physical. It's maybe a mental mistake or an effort issue. You talked about criticism. Is there anything else that stands out for you that makes a great coach for you?

P: I guess the last thing that I can think of and it… I don't know why I thought of this, but Coach K at Duke… like whenever you hear him talk he's always like, "We're trying to develop not only good players, but good people." So like it's caring about them not just on the field, but it's off the field too. So yeah, I think that's something that's important. You know, not just caring about their career or the year that they're having or whatever it is… it's caring about them as a person. I don't know why… Coach K is just the example that I can think of because I always hear him saying stuff in all of his press conferences… you know, "He was a great player when he was here, but he's a better person" and things like that and he was like… I think he said something at some point… he's like, "I don't consider myself a coach. I more consider myself a teacher." Which is good because you can coach somebody on the field, but you teach people life skills and things like that so I think that's one of the good things about athletics especially like in younger people… you can learn a lot of life skills from playing… any sport… whether it is hard work, dedication, team work, things like that… so any way that you're able to incorporate that I think is something that is also important.

I: In your experiences of playing for these great coaches, did you feel like they did that for you?

P: Um… you know, I have… actually my coach that was in Utah during high school has actually moved out to California… out to San Diego… but even before that, we would talk on the phone all the time… You know, it was kind of neat when he got out there because he got to come down and he started doing to the same thing out here as he did in Utah. So he started a team up and you know, he would bring his guys down and I would show him through the clubhouse at USC and things like that and they got a big kick out of that, but you could just tell like you know… he cared about them more than just how they were playing on the field. He tried to do things for them off the field. I guess that's probably the best example I have that I can think of. I'm sure there will be better examples with the coach that I have this year and a few years down the road, but it was only 3 months ago that I played for him… so I can't really say a whole lot about that… so that was probably the best example.

I: And you also talked about the importance of being a teacher… in your own experiences, did you experience that?

P: Yeah, you know… teaching and coaching, I guess, on the field are kind of hand in hand. Teaching… more I guess… would be going through the process of having to get something done whether it be fielding a ground ball and the right steps to do that… you know, coaching is where you are hitting in the line up and things like that… but off the field is… I guess you teach somebody on the field to learn things… off the field by you know… there are plenty of things that we don't want to go through when we're on the field… I mean, whether it's conditioning when you're running out there… and they teach you how to get through that… That's something that you really can't learn unless you go through it and some coaches will just run you until you die and they never say a word and when you're done they're like, "Alright go and shower up. You're out of here." But if you get something done with a good coach and he knows that it wasn't easy, he's right there after you know… "Nice job." Giving you a pat on the back or whatever… it kind of gives you a little bit of positive reinforcement that he knows that you obviously didn't want to do what you were doing right then, but you know… I guess that's the best way to describe that…

I: You said that they teach you how to get through it… is there a way that they…

P: Um… in some ways, it can be a technique, but you know… when I say this… I'm talking about conditioning mostly because that's probably the least desirable thing to do when it comes to sports, but you know… they teach you… like for baseball for example, they teach you how to conserve your energy throughout the year. When I came out of college, I was one of those guys that would be in the cage early to hit. And I liked to do all this extra work because that's just how I've always done and then I had the energy to do that because we didn't play that many games. Well, I got into August this year and I was doing same thing and I was wiped out. I mean, there was like 2 and a half weeks where I was awful. I couldn't do anything. My energy was gone and I was playing terrible and I was a miserable existence basically because I was dreading going to the field every day. So I went in and I was like, "Man, I don't know what's going on, but I just have no energy. I'm dead tired." So we kind of sat down and we went over a plan… like let's go out on a couple days a week, cut your swings down to 15 or 20 or whatever it may be… but kind of taught me some ways to still get work that I need to get done, but a little bit smarter way to get it. Because you can't go out there when you're playing that many games and just go all out every single day before the game starts. I mean, obviously when the game starts, you want to go all out, but you know, if you're playing that many games, you have to conserve your energy getting ready.

I: So you were able to go to your coach and you felt comfortable enough to share that you were tired?

P: Yeah… oh yeah… and he was really good too about… if you needed a day off… I mean, if you were wiped out… he would give you a day off if you asked him, but not a whole lot of players like to go in and say, "I want a day off." But, he would work those in for you… but it was also easy enough to go up to him and I felt very comfortable saying, "Look, I'm drained right now… I feel like I'm out of energy and what do you think we can do to work on this because what I'm doing right now isn't working." I hit that wall. I hit the brick wall. I didn't have anything left to give. So by kind of backing it off a little bit and being a little bit more strategic I was able to kind of get going again and get that last energy to push through the end of September…

I: So… most athletes, the last thing they want to do is go in and tell their coach that their tired…

P: (laughs)

I: The fact that you were willing to go in and do that… would you have been willing to do something like that maybe with your other coaches that you didn't feel were as great for you?

P: No on a couple levels… One, because I knew that he wouldn't react negatively. I knew that he wasn't going to blow me up and say that you're a woos, you shouldn't be tired." But the other side is that he was experienced. I'm telling you, if you go through a minor league season, you know that you get tired. You do… you just get mentally and physically tired. So since he had been through it before and since you know, I knew that he cared about me, not just the team… I knew that he would be positive about it and he would try to help me out not just throw it out the window and say, "Suck it up and get out there and finish." So…

I: So is there anything else that stands out for you?

P: I think I'm running pretty dry now… I'm trying to think if there's anything else. I think that's about it…

APPENDIX E

Pledge of Confidentiality

As a member of this research team, I understand that I will be reading transcripts of confidential interviews for a manuscript titled, “It’s Not What They Do, It’s How They Do It: Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching.” The information in these transcripts has been revealed by research participants who participated in this project on good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentially agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information in these transcriptions with anyone except the primary researcher of this project, Andrea Becker (974-0601), or other members of this research team. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER SIGNATURE	DATE
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APPENDIX F

Appendix F consists of six tables containing the meaning units, sub-themes, and general themes for each of the dimensions representing athlete experiences of great coaching. Each dimension is marked by a different color: Coach Attributes (blue), Environment (yellow), System (orange), Relationships (purple), Coaching Actions (green), and Influences (pink).

Table 2

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coach Attributes

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACH ATTRIBUTES	MORE THAN JUST A COACH	Great Person	• Coach is just a great person (p2) • Great people make great coaches (p2) • I had an offensive line coach, great guy (p1)
		Teacher	• She's just a great teacher (p13) • Great coaches are teachers and those lessons transcend whatever sport your playing (p17) • Coach calls himself a teacher first and foremost (p17)
		Parental Figure	• They just seem to know everything. You can't get anything by them. They are like your parents (p3) • He was like a father figure (p12) • He was kind of who I looked up to and wanted to please and have him be proud of me (p13) • It gave you a sense not only to want to win for your team, but to want to win for him, to make him proud of you because I think it was an extension of a parent (p6) • He was this English guy who was definitely like a father figure. He always made you feel better (p12)
		Mentor	• He was such a great mentor that he instilled it all throughout the program (p3) • Being away from home and really having someone to kind of look up too and coach you and mentor you and help you out with pretty much anything you needed (p6)
		Friend	• She was my coach, but also a friend (p13) • I knew him almost like a good buddy (p15) • I almost want to say that [my coach was like a] friend, but some people might misinterpret that. I think when somebody is your friend and you're doing things for them, you don't want to let them down (p11)
		Natural Leader	• I still come back to [my coach] just being a born leader (p12) • He's just such a natural leader (p12)
		Expert	• People who are experts in their field see things more clearly and quicker than lay people and he's just one of those guys (p17) • My coach was light years ahead of any other coach that I've ever played for (p12) • My coach was more knowledgeable about the game of volleyball than anybody I have ever known in my life (p5) • I think my coach's level of sophistication in coaching was just higher (p12) • He was like the guru (p1)
		Legend	• He's an absolute legend (p7) • My coach got to the point as to where the university was known as a school to start turning out [NFL] offensive lineman (p1)
		Human	• Off the court, he was more like a human being. On the court, he was a coach (p13) • It's nice for coaches to show a little bit of emotion and not be so stoic that they can't be human (p9) • So I think his humility combined with his greatness is part of what makes him great (p17) • He thinks he makes one big mistake a year and he's not afraid to admit it when he does (p3) • If a coach can step up and say, "This is my bad and I messed up," you have a lot more respect for them than if they constantly point the finger (p3) • You have to have somebody that's willing to say, "I don't have all the answers. There might be a better way," and not being so prideful that they can't admit that (p2)

Table 2 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coach Attributes

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACH ATTRIBUTES	PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS	Cognitive	Knowledgeable	• He was very knowledgeable about the tactics of the game (p17) • He was just very knowledgeable about what the best up-to-date techniques were (p5) • He was very very knowledgeable (p9) • I became the player I was because of her knowledge (p13) • He's just a mastermind for [the sport] (p10) • Just the knowledge of what you're doing is kind of the obvious trait. If you don't know what you're doing, you're not going to be very good at it (p2) • He always had the right answers to any questions that I had (p9) • Coach was a devout student of the game. He spent his life watching soccer, studying soccer, training under other coaches, and attending seminars or clinics (p17) • Coach is always learning and always bringing that to us • His love for the game and his passion made him an incredible student and absorber of knowledge (p17)
			Smart	• So to have somebody that is smart enough that they will look for a better way to do things... always searching for the next thing to help their guys is another thing that makes a great coach • Coach was smart (p2)
			Innovative	• My coach thought outside the box (p15)
			Creative	• Coach was creative in how he solved problems (p3)
		Emotional	Passionate	• He was super passionate about the game and you knew that he loved the game (p7) • He was very passionate about soccer and about people... I think first about making sure that you were okay as a person before soccer (p12) • He was very passionate about coaching. You just felt that from his presence, the way he ran his practices, everything about what he did, he was just really intense about it and you could just feel the passion and it was good (p5) • Coach was passionate about teaching the game (p14) • I think my coach wanted to work with young people. He enjoyed the process of getting his team better. He enjoyed the competition of the games, but he enjoyed the process even better. He liked seeing a kid develop personality wise (p14)
			Enthusiastic	• He was a really enthusiastic guy (p15) • He had an upbeat attitude that carried over to the team (p2)
			Inspirational	• He was just so inspirational (p12) • He was probably the most emotional coach that I've ever had as far as being able to inspire people. He was amazing. He was probably the most inspirational coach I ever had (p15)
			Calm, but Intense	• He was very calming (p12) • He was very intense, but it was like a calm intense almost (p5) • I never heard him really yell like this before. He wasn't really a yeller, he was a pretty calm guy, but very intense (p12) • He was one of the more intense coaches I ever had (p12)

Table 2 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coach Attributes

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACH ATTRIBUTES	PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS *(continued)*	Emotional *(continued)*	Emotionally Stable	• I think the real key to our confidence in him was his steady emotional state throughout the season. He would get excited and he would get down, but win or lose you could have a normal conversation with him (p6) • Coach didn't get too emotionally excited (p6) • He was like our rock (p12) • He wasn't emotionally fragile (p17) • Coach was able to elicit emotions out of his players without coming off himself as being very emotional. He was a happy guy, but wasn't impulsive. You would never see him in a halftime talk pulling off his jacket and stomping back out onto the field (p12) • He was never really an emotional builder. I think he really relied on the teammates to do that for each other (p6)
		Social	Genuine	• He was really genuine. He wasn't fake (p13) • You can see right through a coach's bullshit really easy and I never had that problem with him (p15)
			Loyal	• Where that could have been an opportunity for somebody to say, "Alright let's give up on the kid, he's obviously hurt. It's not going to work." He came back and said, "Alright, let's start throwing 3 quarters or way down low." (p15) • I think he gained my respect because even when things were going kind of bad when I was kind of learning, he still stuck with me. He kind of still remained loyal and he still invoked this confidence like he believed in me (p13)
			Patient	• The patience that's I'm talking about is more in trying to work with people. I've never seen so much patience with players because any of my other coaches would have probably yelled at them (p12) • She was very patient with me in terms of teaching me techniques (p13) • He had patience with you (p14)
			Honest	• Coach was just honest with you (p2) • He's an honest guy and he has a lot of integrity and people start to believe in him and trust him. So you want to play for him. You play harder for him and you end up winning more football games because you're coach has rallied his troops and his integrity and his honesty is something that makes you want to go out there and do a good job and play hard every day (p16) • I don't know if I've run across somebody who was a good coach and a good communicator and was honest who I didn't like (p9)
			Candid	• He was extraordinarily candid in his assessments and when goal setting with athletes (p17)
			Flexible	• He was flexible in his thinking (p2)
			Non-judgmental	• He was very un-judgmental. If you made a mistake or got caught doing this or got in trouble for that, he was pretty understanding (p6) • I could tell my coach I was tired because I knew that he would be positive about it and he would try to help me out (p2)
			Demanding	• He was really demanding too (p15)
			Likeable	• He was just a very likeable guy. I think that most of the players that you talk to would smile if you brought up his name because there is always a funny story (p6)

Table 2 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coach Attributes

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACH ATTRIBUTES	PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS *(continued)*	Social *(continued)*	Humorous	• He had a great sense of humor (p6) • He's just a funny guy. He's always just making silly jokes (p3) • He was just really funny. Really, one of the most innately funny people I've ever met (p7) • He was a funny guy and you liked being around him (p6)
			Rare/Special	• The fact that he really cared about his players and what they did in life after college made him special (p6) • It's rare to have a manager like that. So the times that you do, you have to take advantage of it and you're sorry to see it end (p2)
			Balanced	• He was really welcoming at first, but he was one of the more intense coaches I ever had (p15) • So it was important to have kind of the light hearted attitude on the side and then still be able to constructively criticize when necessary (p2) • He was a disciplinarian without being a jerk. He was strict without being a screamer (p17) • He has his times when he gets serious and you definitely know, but the humor helps it be a little less tense. You feel comfortable because if there's humor, it's not too serious (p3) • He was firm when he needed to be and it was with the whole team and he was forgiving when he needed to be and I don't really know how he learned to be that way as a coach (p12) • If you can kind of get that balance between somebody that will come down on you and somebody that you really like as a person, that's a good kind of balance (p2)
			Disciplined	• He was disciplined and wanted to win and wanted to get the best out of us (p13) • She is one of the most disciplined people I've ever met (p4)
		Psychological	Confident	• He was a very confident man (p1)
			Competitive	• He hated to lose and you knew that when you played for him (p6) • What made coach special was just being competitive, being someone that wants to win and that's going to push you to do it and everything that is necessary from a coaching perspective to do it (p8) • Coach's desire to win fed over to the team (p1)
			Perfectionist	• He was quote unquote... perfectionist (p1) • A lot of coaches are perfectionists (p16)
			Dedicated	• All great coaches have that drive and they push themselves
			Aggressive	• From a strategic standpoint, they always want to be the aggressor (p14)
			Meticulous	• We used to look at game plans and we used to go, "What is this?" There were so many numbers on there and there was so much stuff. The guy was meticulous (p7) • He's very meticulous about technique (p13)
			Organized	• He was very organized. He always had sort of a master plan in terms of practices (p10)
			Committed	• Great coaches come in at 6am in the morning and leave at 12:30 or 1:00am (p1)

Table 2 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coach Attributes

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACH ATTRIBUTES	PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS *(continued)*	Psychological *(continued)*	Consistent	• He was consistent. You could figure him out (p7) • You see them on the field acting the same way they are and off the field (p2) • If he said he was going to do something, he did it (p15) • Words and actions were consistent (p9) • He was consistent in his management style: how he brought in players, how he substituted, etc. (p7) • The framework for discipline was consistent (p17) • In preparation (p14) • If he said he was going to be there, he would be there. If he said that he was going to help you do something, he would help you (p15) • When they are consistent, it's very clear what they want from you (p9)
			Professional	• He was just very professional (p7) • Calm, cool, and collected. A true professional (p9) • A gracious loser and a humble winner (p9) • My coach had character and class (p16) • He was very respectful of other people (p16)

Table 2 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coach Attributes

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACH ATTRIBUTES	ABILITES	To Adapt: Over Time To the Athlete To the Sport To Society	• He's not the same coach he was when I played for him (p10) • Coach is getting a little softer than he was, but it's probably just as we age, we get smarter (p1) • A great coach kind of changes with the athletes that he has (p1) • His philosophy doesn't change… just the things he expects and asks [athletes] to do change (p1) • As athletes change and personalities change, so do coaches (p1) • You have to kind of learn and change. When I was in high school, you could grab my facemask, you could shake my head or whatever. If you do that now, you're in trouble (p1) • A great coach takes the players that he has and coaches them to the best of their abilities at things they can do and doesn't try to make a team do what he is used to coaching… make them try to do it (p1) • My coach adjusted to some of the changes in college basketball (p14) • I think football coaches change just as society is changing. So a great coach doesn't always stay exactly the same (p1)
		Get Along with People	• I got along with him (p6) • He wasn't really hard to get along with (p6) • He wasn't the kind of person who could really rub you wrong (p6)
		Compartmentalize	• I think truly great coaches are able to compartmentalize (p17)
		Work Within Their Personality	• You can't change who you are and you can't be something that you're not. You just have to emphasize what you're good at and let your assistants do what you're not good at (p10)
		Read People	• He was always able to read people the right way and he brought out the best in all of his players (p12)
		Analyze	• And then he was very good at figuring out the tactics to stop an opponent (p7) • He was amazing at stealing signs (p15) • He always scouted the other teams real well and the percentage of sets that would go to each payer in each rotation and he would specifically tell you what to look for and kind of give you hints (p6) • She did a really good job of scouting the other team (p5)
		To Effectively Integrate Their Personal and Professional Life	• My friends at other schools talk about how the coach absolutely separates her personal life and business life. I feel that at my school none of it is separated (p3) • You could see the way my coach cared for his son and it just carried over (p2) • They want us to be a part of everything. Basically, we are a part of their family (p3)
		To Evaluate and Recognize Player Potential	• He had high expectations and I think he saw potential in girls and knew what they were capable of being (p5) • Sometimes it's about coaches putting people in the right positions and he saw that (p14) • He was good at knowing what people were capable of and what he wanted from them and he would push them until he got out of them what he wanted (p5) • Coach was a great evaluator of talent (p17) • He was a brilliant assessor of talent (p17) • He's good at knowing what people are capable of doing. When I came in, I didn't know what position I played and he told me, "You're going to be a great outside hitter." (p5)

Table 2 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coach Attributes

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACH ATTRIBUTES	EXPERIENCE	As a Player	• He wasn't just basing himself on something he read (p17) • He played on the national team and he played in college and I think that gave him more respect and credibility (p6) • She had already experienced everything that I was kind of going through. So she could pass that on to me and help me (p13) • You had a ton of respect for him because you knew he'd been there and you knew what he was saying was right (p12) • He has a [championship] ring. He wore the ring everyday in practice. Who better to lead us than a guy who's been there and won a ring. It made you realize. "Hey, he's been there. He's done it. You're a fool not to listen." I also think it helps with the buy in (p15) • I was an 18 year old, kind of good athlete who was pretty good at soccer and the next I know, the coach is telling me what to do and I'm listening to him because he's won a national title (p17) • I've always had more respect and listened a little bit more attentively to coaches who have done the things that they are teaching and have been on the court and have been in those situations because they can draw from their own experiences and they know what does and what doesn't work (p17) • They had experience and they were fighting in the trenches like I did. So they know what it means. They know what it's like to put your hand down and grab and play for four quarters (p16) • He understands that it's a grind because he went through it and you could ask him questions (p2) • He played the game so he kind of gave us the inside... he taught us all the ins and outs and that made him an exceptional coach (p1)
		As a Coach	• He has a large amount of coaching experience (p12) • A lot of it just has to do with his background and where he came from. He spoke gospel when it came to pitching (p15) • Most younger coaches will stop play more often [in practice]. My coach didn't stop play as much. When he did stop play, he made a point that was very salient and I think that just comes with experience (p12) • He's well respected in the volleyball world. He worked with the Olympic coaches. So his background in knowing volleyball is great and I think when you have that, it's easier to buy into what he's trying to teach (p7) • He kind of had a reputations that proceeded him and I went in there with the confidence already and then he also earned it (p6) • He was good at using past coaching experiences to help him make current decisions (p11) • When he brings players in, he already had their respect (p12)

Table 2 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coach Attributes

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACH ATTRIBUTES	IMPERFECTIONS	Interpersonal Style	• I think he could have been a little more interactive and a little less tyrannical (p17) • I don't think he related in a certain way (p17) • Coach was very knowledgeable, but didn't have a people personality (p2) • I believe that his style turned off certain people to the point where they didn't maximize their abilities. So I think that's a mark of where he fell short of the ideal (p17) • He wasn't able to be flexible in adapting his interpersonal style. So I think it was hard for certain players to connect with him (p17)
		Management	• He allowed our assistant coaches to be there and not do a very good job (p11) • The only knock against him was that I don't feel he managed personnel to maximize their potential (p17) • His greatest skills were tactic and strategic game skills and I think where he came up a little short of my ideal would be in terms of player and personnel management (p17)
		Emotional Control	• He got very upset at times (p17) • He allowed his personal life to affect his mood on the field (p17) • You could tell he was going through personal challenges and those things definitely affected him (p17) • Those things in his personal life that weren't so good had a carry over affect to his coaching and to the team (p17)
		Ability To Overcome Imperfections	• Coach was such a natural leader that his shortcomings as a tactical coach didn't matter (12) • I never thought I would put him at the top of my best coaches list when I first started because he was so inexperienced, but he was just so inspirational (p12)

Table 3

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Environment

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
ENVIRONMENT	GENERAL TEAM ENVIRONMENT	Structured Rules/Behavioral Guidelines	• He provided a good structure for the team to understand the rules and how to comport yourself and how to pull for each other and created an excellent team environment (p17) • Most guys respond well to working with a defined set of rules and a system and one that is put into place without favoritism and provides the right kind of regular discipline (p17) • There wasn't any room for breaking the rules. You did and you would sit out a game, you would get kicked out of practice. He didn't allow you to break the rules because he didn't want you too. So the consequences were stern and everyone knew what they were and therefore the rules were so rarely broken that they never really had to be enforced (p6) • I think for kids 13-18, boys in particular, I think most guys want to be part of something that is unique or holds itself to a higher standard. It just gives them some structure (p17) • He had a rule sheet that said, "Don't do anything to embarrass the university." That was the rules and actually as the years went by there were a few more rules like you had to wear Adidas apparel and you'll go to all tutoring assignments and that kind of stuff, but that was all fluff. He only cared about one (p7) • As young guys, you like to goof off and monkey around and he would tolerate that to an extent, but the rules were the rules. So you didn't do anything to embarrass your team or your school or yourself and certainly not your coach (p17)
		Not Ambiguous	• I knew my role (p10) • I knew exactly where I stood on the team (p10) • The expectations were clear (p13)
		Family-Like	• It was just like a huge family atmosphere (p3) • Our team went to the coach's house on different occasions and we were like a part of the family (p3) • The family atmosphere stemmed down from the coach (p3) • Even when you are finished playing and you leave the program, you never really leave. You can't go out there and practice anymore and you can't play, but you're still a part of the family (p3) • Alumni always come back to support us (p3) • Some of his quotes during the season we won the title were, "You know, I go home thinking how much I love this team." The only thing I can relate it to is family (p3) • It was more of a family type situation. We were all in it together trying to win a Superbowl and I think that's why we did (p1)
		Lighthearted	• Coach could poke fun and make training lighthearted and you could just be comfortable around him • Coach was always a prankster, always pulling jokes. It was always a lighthearted atmosphere
		Supportive	• If you knew that a teammate or a coach was hurting, you just wanted to be there for them and the same was true when something good happened (p3)
		Caring	• We are a part of their family and it makes you feel like that's how much they care about you. So it adds up. They obviously value me as a person and as a human being (p3)
		Trusting	• Trust that the player beside you will do their job and that you will do your job. People will take care of their responsibilities and then just trust as a human being in terms of having morals and being honest and just being straight forward with people (p16)

Table 3 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Environment

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
ENVIRONMENT	GENERAL TEAM ENVIRONMENT *(continued)*	Athlete Centered	• I think there are coaches that are just interested in their program and what goes on and everything else doesn't matter and I think that the fact that he really cared about his players and what they did in life after college made him special. The fact that he really did try to set us up to succeed in everything wee do not just in that specific sport at that specific time (p6) • There was never any jealousy or worrying about your coach stealing the limelight from your star players (p14) • The team was about the players and it was our team, it wasn't his team (p14) • He said, "This game is about you. It's not about me. When I was playing the game it was about the players, not about the coaches." (p2) • The guys that put their players ahead of them and do everything they can for the players are the guys that in the end get better results for themselves (p2) • Every single day you could tell that they were putting their best out there for you (p7) • I remember thinking how coach was so happy for me and he never actually took any of the credit himself and I think I would attribute all of those goals to the time that he spent with me working on my free-kicks (p12)
		Team Centered	• He did what he thought was best for the team (p10) • Coaches are always doing what's best for the team because there is enough selfishness going on within the team. I mean, the team always has to take precedence (p9) • He was about the team and anyone that was going to hurt or jeopardize the team, he didn't want around (p3) • Sometimes they limited us from talking to the media or they would try to keep us from spreading any kind of gossip or rumors outside. They would tell you that whatever was going on to keep it within the team (p16) • Rules were set up so that players would be accountable to themselves and to the team... that they weren't doing or saying anything that would be a distraction to the team. It wasn't an issue about you crossing the line, it was an issue of you crossing the team's line (p6)
	ONE-ON-ONE COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT	Comfortable	• People were just very comfortable with coach • He would be all ears and always made you feel comfortable to talk to him (p6) • It was always easy to go up to him and I felt very comfortable saying exactly how I felt (p2)
		Coach was Approachable	• He was always very approachable and I felt for other people he was always very approachable too (p12) • I have never had a problem going up and talking to coach (p12) • The coaches made themselves approachable, like not too intimidating (p9) • They were approachable because they were good people and they shared a passion for the game (p9) • I always felt like I could talk to coach about anything (p15) • You never felt like you were stepping over a boundary if you went into their office to ask them a question about the game (p9)
		Accessible	• There was a certain level of accessibility to coach. You always felt like you could talk to them (p11) • His door was always open (p3)
		Understanding	• If you were frustrated, it was nice to be able to go to a coach who understood what was going on and be able to talk or vent and get advice on what to do (p3)
		Open	• There are ways that you can make yourself open to conversation and I don't think there was ever a time when my coach's office door was closed (p9) • If you ever needed anything or wanted to talk stuff over about volleyball or school, you could go into his office and he would be all ears (p6)
		Non-judgmental	• There wasn't anything that you couldn't go to him and talk about that he hadn't already done or at least heard someone else do and he was very un-judgmental (p6)

Table 3 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Environment

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
ENVIRONMENT	PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT	Planned	• Coach was always organized and always had a master plan in terms of practices (p10)
		Structured	• Practices were extremely structured • He structured things to where it wasn't just, "Go out there and get loose." He literally wrote down our warm-ups too (p15)
		Purposeful	• Everything had a purpose (p8) • Even the way we warmed up had a purpose (p15)
		Focused	• We had to be focused in on every possession and we had that type of environment in practice and all of the players did the same thing (p8) • It's focused and you're not going through the motions and everything has a purpose (p8)
		Intense/Game-like	• We focused on practicing situations that were likely to occur in games (p15) • We were always hustling whether we were playing a scrimmage or getting a drink (p8) • There was just water behind the basket and you got it when you needed it. So we never... probably only 4 or 5 times in my entire career did she ever say, "Alright stop... go get a drink." (p8) • Coach didn't stop play as much. When he did stop play, he made a point that was very salient (p12)
		Demanding	• Coach was always pushing us in practice • He was very demanding of every player no matter what they did • Coach demanded hard work
		Competitive but Secure	• The practice environment was competitive, but it was healthy competition (p17) • There was an incredibly competitive practice environment where it was completely self-motivated by the players on the court, which eventually brought out good leaders (p7) • Once you earned your position, you felt secure in knowing that you weren't going to get put on the bench in the first ten minutes if you made a slip or did something wrong (p17)
		Serious/Fun	• He always made it fun, but it was business. I think you knew the difference. There was a time where you could screw around and have fun and be doing your thing, but you got on the court whether it was practice or game time, it was all business and everyone knew that and you're all on the same page and you carried the camaraderie from outside the gym and the training room and team trips and everything into those games (p6) • We worked hard, but we also had a lot of fun • There was a time and a place for fun. Obviously if we were scrimmaging, we weren't joking around (p3)
		Self-Motivated	• The practice environment that was created was completely self-motivated by the players on the court, which eventually brought out good leaders (p7)
		Positive	• At the end of the day, he would give you a pat on the back when you needed it (p3) • I knew that coach would never react negatively and blow up on me (p2)

Table 4

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – System

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
SYSTEM	A SYSTEM FOR RUNNING EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR PROGRAM	Coach Belief in System	• It's not the system. It's the way they believed in the system. It's the way they believe in teaching and coaching and having relationships (p14)
		Athlete Belief in System	• It's not about their style or the score, it's the other stuff they do. It's not the system it's the way they believe in the system (p14) • I bought into the system because it met my needs (p1)
		Offensive and Defensive Strategies	• The system that we ran was based on the team we were playing or what we were good at during that particular year (if we were bigger or smaller or quicker or slower) (p4) • We ran the Flex offense and he believed in really basic… every scouting report… it was pretty simple how we were going to beat this team. We were going to wear them out and we were going to foul them out and that's what it came down to all the time when he talked (p14) • She puts in all the options possible that she thinks she could run in a year and then we run different ones depending on who we are playing which makes us hard to scout (p4)
		Weekly Practice Plan/Structure	• The system is just the way they put things in: the installation of a plan, the work week, the philosophy of practice, how the days are structured (p1)
		Structured Environment	• We were there to play and win and play within the system that coach created to help us succeed (p17)
		Based on Philosophy	• He would substitute a lot. He just believed that we could play 9 guys and get our 9 guys better than their 6 guys (p14) • It was all about finding what is everyone's strength and focusing on those strengths and how to put everyone together with those strengths to make the team great (p7) • It was all about figuring out everyone's strength and focusing on those strengths and how to put everyone together with those strengths to make the team great. And then he was very good at figuring out the tactics to stop an opponent. So he created an incredible environment that was incredibly competitive. So he recruited really well and he was a pretty personable guy so in the recruiting process, he was very good. He got very good at putting those pieces together and then executing those pieces against an opponent. That's his deal. He crushes people (p7) • Her favorite quote, "If you have to choose between a person and a thing, you always choose the person. The wonderful thing is that she embodied that quote (p4)
		Adapted the Systems Accordingly	• He plugged guys into certain roles and he didn't look at your height or weight as much as he looked at your skills set He had weird combinations, but he would plug guys in to where they would be most successful (p14) • He had a system that he liked to plug guys in to certain roles (p14)

Table 5

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Relationships

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
RELATIONSHIPS	PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP	Quality of the Relationship	Like a Friendship	• I mean, she was my coach, but also a friend (p13) • I almost want to say friend, but some people might misinterpret that. I think when somebody is your friend and you're doing things for them, you don't want to let them down (p11) • I think that if that coach knows where to draw the line on the friend thing and they can select people on the team that can almost be their friend and they can pick the right people that won't take advantage of that... I think that's important because those players will do anything for that coach (p11)
			Big or Small	• As much of a relationship you wanted to have with coach, whether big or small, you could have (p8)
			Professional and Personal	• Coach was able to keep a very professional relationship while also having a relationship that was very personal with the players (p12) • Our personal lives were not separate. It's just all intermixed. It's not business and then personal life (p3)
			Close/Not Distant	• Coach and I were pretty close • Early on, coach was more distant from the players, but that changed. I think he realized that he could be more personal with the guys and still maintain that objectivity and make difficult decisions regardless of whether or not he had a personal connection with people (p7) • No matter how demanding coach is if you have a close relationship, you want to do more, you want to achieve more (p15)
			Meaningful	• He meant so much to me (p12)
			Good	• Having a good relationship helps. It's just one thing that you don't have to worry about. There are just so many things. Maybe not quite as much in the minor leagues, but when you're in the big leagues, you have your contract stuff and your agent stuff and you have so many things you have to worry about. You know, you get traded and you're moving your family across the country. I mean, there's just a lot of things going on [and if you have a good relationship with the coach] that's just one piece of the puzzle that if you don't have to worry about makes it a lot easier (p2) • I played for him long enough that I kind of caught on to his philosophy and what he was trying to accomplish. So I think that's why I had such a good relationship with him. I respected him and he made me better with the technique things (p5) • You are not going to be as effective [at getting a kid to be coachable] unless of course you can build that bridge (p4)
			Strong	• You know coach would go to war with you if he had too • I think that open communication and him really getting to know who I was and vice versa made for a really strong bond (p2)
			Unique	• It was definitely a unique relationship because I don't think every player has that with every coach (p2)
			Light-hearted	• We could heckle him at times • So I remember laughing at him. Then he made the drill harder and by the time I got back, he was laughing at me (p1)
			Lasting	• I'm still friends with coach to this day (p9) • We still go out to lunch or dinner sometimes (p15) • I still talk to my coach once or twice a month (p13)

Table 5 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Relationships

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
RELATIONSHIPS	PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP *(continued)*	Quality of the Relationship *(continued)*	Connected	• I think it helps when you have a connection with the coach (p6) • The connection might be less important at the youth or professional level, but at the collegiate level I think it's important because you are with them all the time (p3) • So if you can't kind of have that connection, it makes it rough. It's going to cause division and our team was very cohesive and team oriented (p3)
			Comfortable	• She's always friendly, outgoing, very positive, always smiling, and it makes you feel very comfortable (p13) • I always felt comfortable around my coach
			Had Boundaries	• You respect the coach to where you are not going to cross that line to where you are taking advantage (p11) • You could have fun with coach and he would let you pick at him, but there was never a sense that you would ever disrespect him or that you were on the same level. He was always the coach and you were always the player (p6) • The line is not crossed as long as you aren't being treated or asking to be treated differently than anybody else on the team (p11) • You have to have discipline sometimes, but that doesn't mean that you can't have a good relationship and you can't be friends in the right way (p2) • He was completely fine with having fun at the appropriate time. I think that there is a fine line between joking around and kind of going too far. I saw it in high school where players would step over the boundary and kind of go after a coach to try to get the players to laugh and that was never the case in college because I think there was a level of respect for the coach and it was more of a job and you were there to do something (p6) • The line wasn't too far out there. I don't think he would ever press anything. It would be like a one line joke and you could have a little rebuttal, but he would put you in your place if you got out of hand. He would let you know where the line was. It wasn't really out there for discussion or wondering where it was. He was firm, but he wasn't scary at the same time (p6) • The goal was always team. The end point was always how can we make this better so that our team works better and I think if you keep that as your ultimate goal, then it won't seem like a creepy relationship (p12)
		How the Relationship Developed	Established Early	• She built that bridge with me in the recruiting process
			Showed an Interest in Me	• Coach took a personal interest in me • Interested in what was going on with me personally • Coach showed an interest in me, knew something about me (e.g., parents' names, girlfriend, etc.) • I was between the 12th and 15th man the majority of my career and my coach was always interested in me, always interested in my parents, and he didn't have to be • If he felt like he needed to figure out what was going on with a player, he would meet with her independently and have talks about what was going on in her life and what she felt about him and the team and the coaching and just the whole thing
			Spent Time with Me Off Field	• We sometimes went to lunch together • Coach invited us over to his house

Table 5 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Relationships

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
RELATIONSHIPS	PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP *(continued)*	How the Relationship Developed *(continued)*	Related to Me	• Coach was somebody that I could relate too • You always felt like you could talk to them and relate to them on some level (p11) • He could get on the level of the player no matter what their personality was (p15) • I would go in the office for an individual meeting and then we would just start talking about things (p11) • He would laugh and kind of joke with you about things (p15) • Just being able to relate to people and making them feel like you're always there for them regardless of whether it's professional or personal (p9) • I think he definitely related to the guys because he was a player himself and he knows players' mentalities (p6) • Coach related by actually speaking the language of the players (p2) • We related because we had a lot in common (similar interests) (p8) • Coach related by telling stories (p8)
			Supported Me	• Coach was always supportive (p9) • He definitely had my back (p1) • Coach would also take up for you if somebody else was going to talk about you (p1) • Coach reassured me that everything was going to be okay and not to worry (p4)
			Invested in Me	• Coach invested time, energy, and effort into me (p5) • Coach would invest an hour after practice or an hour before practice anytime you needed extra (p5) • She never told me no for anything whether it was watching extra tape before practice or doing an extra workout. Whatever it was, she never said no (p8) • When your coach is so invested in what they are doing, you just want to do it for them just as much as you want to do it for yourself (p5) • Just the amount of time that he invested in you made it seem like it got you back to where you needed to be so much faster (p15) • When coach would take the time for me to watch tape and workout extra and all of those types of things that's going to help gain your respect (p8)
			Prioritized Me	• We were just a big priority to coach (p5) • What I needed (in terms of my health, education, and happiness) was more important than what coach needed from me on the court (p4)
			Wanted Something For Me	• Wanted me to succeed (p6) • Wanted me to go on to play at a university (p1) • Wanted me to grow and develop as a player and as a person (p1) • Wanted me to have a good experience (p9)
			There For Me	• My relationship with coach was built when I had surgery and coach came to visit me. She was there for me (p4) • I felt like coach was always there for me regardless of whether it was professional or personal (p9) • Coach's office door was always open if you had a problem or needed something (p9) • Coach was literally there for you every step of the way no matter what you were doing (p15)

Table 5 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Relationships

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
RELATIONSHIPS	PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP *(continued)*	How the Relationship Developed *(continued)*	Got to Know Me	• Him really getting to know who I was and vice versa made for a really strong bond (p2) • Coach was very good at getting to know each player and provided them with what they needed (p12) • Made an effort to get to know me and learn about me on a personal level (p12) • She knew me, my personality, my work ethic, and my family (p4) • It's easy to get to know players if you pay attention and listen (p8) • He seems to know what works for you and has an idea of how to use that to get the most out of you (p9) • He could always find the nerve in everybody and he knew how to strike it (p15) • It's different at the professional level, but you still can know your players' personalities and know how to communicate with them and learn how to motivate them (p8) • Coach knew me so well that he could see when I was really struggling (p15) • You have to know each of your athletes in order to motivate them. Athletes are all motivated for different reasons (p8)
			Let Me Get to Know Him/Her	• I knew him almost like a good buddy • He shared enough about his own life and his own past experiences that you kind of knew him • I learned his view on things and that kind of helped me understand him on the field • If you know them, it's easier for you to play because you understand what they want and you can relax more and not second guess what they want • Once I knew the coach, I knew exactly what was going to happen. I knew exactly how the man functioned • Knowing coach helped me know what was expected and what I was supposed to do
			Cared About Me	• Coach truly cares about his guys and just the way he goes about his business, you can feel it (p2) • He cared about me as a player, but he also cared about me as a person (p14) • He cared about us more than just how we were playing on the field. He did things for us off the field (p2) • It gave you a sense not only to want to win for your team, but to want to win for him, to make him proud of you (p6) • I just think that if the players know you care about them then they'll do extra and go the extra mile (p7) • Her caring made me want to play for her and made me want to be loyal (p4) • When you know that coach cares, you respect the coach more and take criticism better (p14) • I think in the end if people genuine care who you are, you have a great respect for them, you appreciate them (p14) • It's important for consistency. I think consistently winning (p14) • If that player trusts you and that player give in to you and says, "I believe in you and I care for you because I know you care for me. I'm going to do whatever you ask me to do and I'm not going to hesitate (p4) • Consistently, he gets more out of his players because guys care about him. We want to win not only for ourselves, but for him (p2)
			Valued Me	• Made me feel like I was more than just a number (p11) • Somebody that would kind of reach out and make me feel like I'm not just one of the 25 players on the team... that I add value to the team than just 1 of 25 players (p11) • Valued me as a player and a person (p3) • If you feel like you have value and you have worth, that's when you want to perform for them. You want to do your best and perform to the best you can (p3)

Table 5 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Relationships

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
RELATIONSHIPS	PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP *(continued)*	How the Relationship Developed *(continued)*	Gained My Trust	• Coach was a person that you could always trust • Coach was always the one that I knew that I could go to and trust to pick up the pieces (p12) • I trusted my coach to get me to where I needed to be (p12) • Coach was like a rock. Always somebody you could trust (p4) • Coach always followed through on his words • With the help that he provided, I could trust him
			Gained My Confidence	• I had so much confidence in the fact that my coach knew how to win, had the numbers to prove it, the players to prove it, and when he told you something, you just believed him (p7) • I think the real key to our confidence in him was his steady emotional state throughout the season (p6) • I believed in coach because I knew that he knew what he was talking about
			Gained My Respect	• My coach was one of those coaches that not only did I enjoy playing for him, but I really respected him and it's hard to say that about a lot of coaches (p15) • Coach gained respect by treating people with kindness • I respected the fact that coach got to know each player and provided with the feedback that they needed • Coach gained respect by the way that he carried himself • He gained my respect when things were going kind of bad when I was still learning and he stuck with me • Part of the reason why he was so respected was because of his knowledge • I think his respect for players ended up winning their respect for him (p12) • Coach gained my respect by being honest • Coach gained respect out of love, not fear (p4) • It was just their work ethic • Coach was a great player and has all these records and always finished first in fitness and you just respect him for that • He never had a power trip or a need for over-respect • I think when you have that mix, then it's easy to buy into what the coach is selling and I mean, he's well respected in the volleyball world (p13) • If you have a coach that you respect a lot and you want to play well for, then I think it helps you to play better too because you are not just playing for yourself. You are playing for yourself, your teammates, and your coaches, which is a really big thing because I've played for coaches that I don't want to play for (p5) • We had fun, but there was just a sense of if you respect your coach then even if you are having a good time you still don't want to mess up. You still want to give it your all (p3) • If a player respects you, then that's how you get the best out of them (p3) • I respected him and he made me better with the technique things (p5) • We were motivated because we all respected him as a coach (p10) • He's going to be pissed at me, but if there is a respect there, then I think people take criticism and they take coaching and they take teaching better (p14)

Table 5 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Relationships

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
RELATIONSHIPS	PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP	How Coach Treated Me As a Player	Fairly	• A defined set of rules and a system were put into place without favoritism (p17) • We had a common set of rules that were equally applied to all players (p17) • I certainly never felt like it was unfair (p7) • During practice everybody was treated the same, but outside of practice with personal issues he was very good at getting to know the players and what they needed and supporting them in whatever way they needed (p12) • He equally applied the rules to the star and the bench warmer (p17) • You never got the feeling that he didn't not like somebody (p12) • Coach based a lot of the playing time on statistics (p7) • It's a number game and if you hit this percentage, you're going to play because you are hitting higher than another person (p6) • Using statistics to help make decisions about playing time never favored players. If their numbers are up and they're doing the things that he needs them to do then he will play them (p6)
			With Respect	• Never berated somebody in front of the entire team (p12) • Never publicly humiliated me (p12) • He never embarrassed you when he took you out. He would never yell at you and point at you (p14) • Never broke me down. Coach got people to respond without having to tear them down or yell at them or go crazy like some coaches do (p5) • Never blamed me or the other players, but always took the blame (p4)
			Gave Me a Shot	• I never worried about the opportunity to get a shot. I just knew that I would get a shot and I just knew that it was up to me to take advantage of that shot • He would substitute players and give everybody a shot • Coach gave me a shot to prove myself
			Pushed Me	• Coach didn't let me settle for mediocre and pushed me to reach my limit in terms of my ability (p13) • He taught me that I could push myself further than I thought I could push myself (p1) • They pushed us to be the best athletes we could (both mentally and physically), but also to be the best people we could (p5) • He would pick guys that were starters or emotional leaders of the team and he would push them. He would push me. He would push the team by pushing the leaders (p1) • They pushed me because they knew what I could do and then I did do what they asked (p5)
			Empowered Me	• Let us make decisions regarding our off days, pre-season conditioning, practice schedules, uniforms, and where we would eat on road trips (p14) • We always had veto power on incoming recruits and we sometimes exercised it (p14) • My coach obviously valued my opinions and empowered me to be a leader on the team. It might not be a leader on the team for everything, but it might be a leader for off the field activities or whatever • When he made the decision, he asked our captain what she thought. So it was nice that he addressed somebody on the team first before making a decision (p3) • Each player got a little assignment. The first thing when we have recruits come in is whoever hosts the recruit will tell the coach what he thinks of the recruit

Table 5 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Relationships

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
RELATIONSHIPS	PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP *(continued)*	How Coach Treated Me As a Player *(continued)*	Believed in Me	• Coach believed in every single player no matter what their bad qualities were • Coach always believed in me. It was constant • Coach told others how much he believed in me • I always felt like coach had confidence in me • I think the confidence that coach had himself made his confidence in you feel real (p6) • He believed in every single player no matter what their bad qualities were. He could see the good in anybody (p12) • He is just somebody that you wanted to follow whether that was his enthusiasm. I think it's probably the combination of his own enthusiasm and his believing in you (p12) • He wouldn't want to do anything to knock your confidence. He wants his players to be confident in their abilities even if they are having a rough time (p9) • She instilled confidence in me • Coach had so much confidence in me that I believed in myself • Coach believed in me even when I would doubt myself • Never made me feel like I was a horrible player • Showed me and told me what I was capable of achieving • Coach built my confidence by taking extra time to work with me • Coach emitted so much confidence that it carried over
			Protected Me	• When my body couldn't take the physical pounding, coach provided alternative training regimens • Coach recognized when I was in extreme pain and let me know that it wasn't worth it • From the media... Coach said, "you are never as good as the media says you are during the highs and you are never as bad as they say you are during the lows
			Helped Me	• I knew my coach wanted to help me be the best that I could be • Develop Goals • Adapt to new roles • Re-focus my thinking • Helped me overcome mechanical problems • It's really about helping players individually achieve their potential and then melding that group effort into a common philosophy
			Held Me Accountable	• Rules were set up so that players would be accountable to themselves and to the team... that they weren't doing or saying anything that would be a distraction to the team. It wasn't an issue about you crossing his line, it was an issue of you crossing the team's line (p6) • We had to take responsibility for our actions • There was something attached to everything whether it was positive reinforcement or some type of repercussion (p8) • You could have great athletes and not win. Somebody has to hold you accountable. A great athlete doesn't always hold himself accountable (p1) • Coach used statistics to hold us accountable (p8) • Coach used peer pressure to hold us accountable (p11)

Table 5 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Relationships

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
RELATIONSHIPS	PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP *(continued)*	How Coach Treated Me As a Player *(continued)*	Built on Athlete Strengths	• He would find what it is that each pitcher did well. So for myself, he knew that I knew how to pitch. Not so much that I had the best fastball, off-speed stuff, or anything like that. He just knew that I was a pretty crafty guy. So he knew that I had an idea of how to get people out and he was very much the same type of player. So instead of saying, "Okay, we're going to work on a bunch of different things to make you the guy that I want you to be." Instead he would say, "Alright, this is what you do well. Okay, that works. Let's try to make it the best that we can." (p15) • Coach said, "Let's invest the time in honing in on the skills that you already have that you do well." (p15) • He would look at what you did well and he would milk it for everything that it was worth. He would always find the one thing that you did well and he'd run with it (p15) • There was always an emphasis on the correct things (p12)
			Allowed For Individuality	• "This is how I teach goal keeping and you are going to metamorphosis into this player." He's not like that at all. They accept who you are when you come in (p3) • Instead of saying, "Well, you have to develop a curve ball. You have to develop this." He didn't. He'd help you work on it here and there, but he'd say, "Hey, this is what you do well, let's make it great." (p15) • He communicated to me, "Hey this is what you do well and this is what we're going to make you great at." Instead of saying all the time, "Okay, we're going to work on a bunch of different things to make you the guy that I want you to be." (p15) • And not saying, "this is the one and only way to do it." In baseball, there a lot of ways to get things done (p2) • Where it's not like their way or the highway. You have habits in the way you play... and the coach isn't going to transform you into a different player. It's not textbook, but it's okay (p3)
			Never Held a Grudge	• He was pretty understanding.... there were rules and there were going to be punishments, but I don't feel like he ever held anything over your head or kept anything against you and it definitely wouldn't affect your playing time if you were one of the better players (p6) • He would say what he had to say and get his point across and then it was over. He was really good at letting good stuff. • He's one of those guys that would get in your face if he needed too, but he'll come back the next day and it's like it never happened. He's the first person to say something to you. He just moves by it (p2)
			Inspired Me	• Coach inspired me to go out and play hard • Coach did things that were inspirational
			As More Than Just a Player	• Made sure that the players were okay as people (like what was going on in their life) before addressing [anything related to the sport] (p12) • Treated us as adults (p7)

Table 6

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	TEACH	Sport Skills	Cognitive	• Strategies • Tactics • Systems of play • Knowledge of the game
			Physical	• Techniques • Fundamental game skills • Physical conditioning
			Mental	• Game Readiness • Mental Toughness • Anticipation • Focus • Letting go of mistakes • Pre-competition routines • Pre-performance routines • Imagery • Mental rehearsal
		Life Skills	Values	• Discipline • Respect • Patience • Personal Responsibility • Accountability • Dedication • Self-Reliance • Loyalty • Resilience • How to take care of yourself
			Beliefs	• Self-perceptions • Confidence
			Attitudes	• Staying positive • To never quit • Team Work • Maintaining a good attitude
			General	• Work habits • Giving credit to others • Dealing with pressure • Dealing with stress • To handle adversity

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	TEACH *(continued)*	Method of Teaching	Instructions	• "You can't come in too tight and allow them to beat us over the top"
			Feedback	• Provided feedback
			Questioning	• He would question you and he would make you think about what you were doing and why it was wrong and what you need to do next time (p11) • He encouraged players to be pro-active rather than just... it's like when you're sitting in a lecture and somebody is talking at you versus asking questions and giving answers (p12)
			Demonstrations	• I'm a visual learner. So she didn't just talk to me, she kind of got in there with me and showed me, held my hand, and we video-taped
			Film	• We would watch video of the game and occasionally of training
			Chalkboard	• You need to be on the field with the coach drawing it and then you need to be on the field with the coach physically moving you
			Reading	• By the end of my career, I could read the scouting report and know (p1)
			Modeling	• The way they teach you how to win is by example (p1) • For me, coaching greatness is somewhat intertwined with teaching greatness and modeling for young people (p17) • They teach you by going out there and having character themselves, being first class • We learned to have a good attitude because coach had a good attitude
			Workbooks	• We did mental training workbooks
			Repetition	• It was repetition after repetition • We did it over and over and over until we got it right
			Manual Manipulation	• Coach physically moved us to different places (p17)
		Quality of Teaching	Specific	• A really great coach can come at you with specific clues about your performance (p1) • When he'd instruct, it would be very specific (p6) • He would be very specific and the angle of your hands or take a step this way or a step that way (p6)
			Detailed	• He coached the details (p17) • He had the ability to teach the smaller things that add up and pick out the guy that's out of position and show him where he needs to be (p14) • Coach doesn't need film to see something, he can stand on the sidelines and pinpoint a specific detail about what an athlete is doing and what the athlete needs to do (p1) • Coach could pull out the finer things when teaching a player • Coach paid great attention to the little details (p13) • We worked for hours on how to defend an inbounds pass
			Simplified	• She breaks it down to the simplest sense. She just simplifies everything (p13) • He always found a way to literally break it down to the most simplistic sense (p15) • Coach broke things down so that when you got in the game, there wasn't a whole lot of thinking, there wasn't a whole lot of questioning as to is it that I needed to get done (p15)

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	TEACH *(continued)*	Quality of Teaching *(continued)*	Progression	• He set up training sessions so that there was a progression. You would start out small and go big and he would build on his teachings (p12) • When we moved from simple to complex the purpose of the drill was not lost... the same theme runs through each progression (p12)
			Slow Motion	• We worked on everything in slow motion (all the little technical things) (p1) • Coach would slow things down for us until we got it (p1)
			Athlete paced	• She just broke things down for me and we kind of moved at a pace to my learning curve (p13) • So I think that's why it was a process for me because so much was coming at me at once. I was learning, trying to make... school was different and all that, but I think the thing my freshman year that she did is just she let it be at my own pace (p8) • She just allowed me the time to where I felt more comfortable in taking kind of more ownership of my game and then also of the team (p8) • As you get older, he'll start to tell you a little bit more... things you need to improve on because he knows you can take it more (p3)
			Not Like a Micro-Manager	• He was a great coach because he didn't micro-manage, which a lot of coaches do. You can inhibit players from doing what it is that they do best • He did a good job of knowing when to say, "Okay, do your thing." Or he knew when to step in and say, "Okay, I need you to do this."
			Individualized	• He's another one of those guys that could always find the nerve in everybody and he knew how to strike it. So if he needed to sit you down and chew your ass, he would. If he needed to put his arm around you and be a big brother or father figure to you, he would. So I think ultimately you respect somebody a lot more that way and you start to have a little more trust (p15) • He kind of knew how to deal with me (p15) • I think it's much harder for coaches to build confidence than take it away. You don't want to be so fragile with somebody if they can't take criticism. I think everybody should be able to take criticism, but it's the coaches that can find out how to... because some people can really take it and some people just can't (p9) • He knew I could take being yelled at so if he yelled at me I would be totally fine with it. It's like you also have to know what players are going to break down if you treat them a certain way (p12) • He just seems to have an agenda for each athlete and he knew how we would respond to whatever he threw at us (p13)

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	COMMUNICATE	Content of Communication	Expectations	• Coach always conveyed what he wanted • Coach told me exactly what I needed to do if I wanted to play (p17) • When you failed to meet expectations, he let you know load and clear (p5) • We knew exactly what coach wanted us to do in terms of getting better, improving, and helping the team (p7) • If you didn't perform to coaches expectations, you were out (p5) • No matter who comes in the gym, you have to be ready to play (p12)
			Performance Relevant Information	• I always knew when I did it right and when I did it wrong. When I did it right, Coach said, "That's it." And when I did it wrong, it was like, "Okay, follow through." (p13) • There was constant feedback, but it wasn't negative, it was just there (p13)
			Roles	• So I always pretty much knew what my role was and knew what his expectations of me were (p10) • You have to execute your part. If you breakdown on that defensive blitz, you are not doing your part as an individual player (p1) • Just having him redirect my focus and say, "Hey look, you could really help us here." And then doing it was huge. So I think that's what kind of adds to him being a great coach is him finding a way to make it work (p15)
			A Common Vision	• I think one of the common elements I would say for coaching greatness would be the ability to communicate a common vision to a group of young men • Coaches that were good leaders did a good job at getting players to buy into what needs to be done and also creating an environment where everybody wants to accomplish the same goal (p17) • He was a bit inexperienced, but at the same time it seemed like it didn't matter because all he needed to do really was to get everybody on the team to believe the same thing and it sort of proved to be that way for the next three years (p12) • In order for a team to achieve something, you have to all be striving for the same thing, the same direction, and you have to know how you are going to get there. So I think that's one good thing he did • When you can get every player on the team, every person in the office or business to all be working for the same goal... my coach had that. He had the uncanny ability to make people do that from the guy making 9 million dollars a year to the guys that was making 65,000 (p1) • You take 65 different people and 65 different egos, that's 65 different personalities and then you get them working toward a common goal. We had that. It was everybody (p1) • From the big money guy to the little money guy, everybody was doing his part to help the team (p1) • I think you have to have teammates and a coaching staff that is all on the same goal and the goal that was the same was that we wanted to win the whole thing. So what we were doing right now was going to prepare us for later on when we get into the Final Four and/or championships (p13) • Even though practice was monotonous and it was just doing the same thing every day, we knew that it was for a common goal, which was to win the whole thing (p13) • Egos take away from the unity of a team, but we never had that. He got people to work toward a common goal (p1) • He had the uncanny way to get everybody to work together, sort of like a politician. No matter what your views are, I'm going to make you go out and vote for me... he had that (p1)

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	COMMUNICATE *(continued)*	Content of Communication *(continued)*	Goals and Objectives	• What are your goals? Literally, how many goals do you want this year? How many assists? What are you goals for the national team? Do you want to start? Do you just want to make the roster? Do you want to actually start in the starting 11 and play all 90 minutes? (p9) • Goal setting was technical based. For example, I want to get a few more outs and then as far as the team, it was to win a national championship (p3) • We had short term goals and long terms goals. We would have goals set for one game, what we wanted to do for that game. Then we had goals set for the season and I think that the whole goal setting and mental work really helped and defined her as a pretty solid coach (p5) • We had a very candid conversation at the beginning and the end of the season. He said, "Hey, you did X, Y, and Z well and you developed here, but if you want to play more, if you want to earn a scholarship, you get better at these two things." (p17) • He has scheduled meetings with players where you go and discuss what your goals are and what your future is (p9) • She sat us down a lot and had us write down our goals and asked us what we wanted to accomplish, where we were at, where we wanted to be, and what it would take to get there (p5) • We would do a lot of workbook work and I think goal setting was at the core of that and if you know what it is that you want to achieve and you know what you have to do to achieve that, then your work day in and day out has more of a purpose (p5) • Maybe a better way to phrase it would be aggressive goal setting as opposed to moderate or passive or weak goal setting (p17) • He'd always say, "I know you're goal is to be this at the beginning of the year, but let's kind of redirect your focus now. You can be a big part of this team being our middle relief guy and eat up a lot of innings (p15) • So as a coach and a teacher, he was able to present reasonable, clear goals to me as an individual (p17)
			What to do and How to do it	• He'd go over practice and everything was drawn out and he would tell us what we were going to do and how we were going to do it (p10) • He was good at communicating exactly what he wanted you to do (p7) • Coach didn't just tell us to "get it done." That's too broad. He told us how to get it done (p1)
			Explanations for Coach Actions	• I think that it's important for an intelligent athlete to know why and I think that my coach was good at explaining why (p7) • Everything coach did had a purpose and he always explained why we did things a certain way (p13) • Coach was honest about playing time and the reason why you might not play (p16)
		Method of Communication	One-on-One Communication	• Individual meetings • Coach would talk to me after games in terms of his expectations and demands, "This is what I need from you." (p13)
			Through the Players	• My coach knew that certain players were well respected by the rest of the team. So he used those players to communicate messages to the rest of the team (p11) • I didn't consciously do it. I wasn't like, "Oh, that's nice that he values my opinion, I'm going to help him out [by talking to the team for him]," it just happened (p11)

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	COMMUNICATE *(continued)*	Content of Communication *(continued)*	Analogies	• Coach found out what we liked and then used analogies and their experiences to get their point across
			In Writing	• Coach would write notes to the players
			Through practice organization	• My coach communicated through his organization of practices. The way that practices were organized helped us know where we stood (p10)
			Non-Verbal Behaviors	• You knew whether coach was happy, angry, heated, or excited by his facial expressions, mannerisms, or demeanor (p5) • If coach was upset, you could tell by his demeanor. He didn't have to yell at you (p5)
			Got My Attention	• Knew how to get the players' attention whether it was speaking softly or yelling and screaming (p1) • My coach figured out what excited each player and found a way to grab their attention (p8) • Coach would tell stories to get our attention and I just remember as a kind, sitting there and just not even knowing what was going on around me (p8) • Coach did some things for shock value to get our attention (6)
			Coach Listened	• When I went to talk to coach, he listened and gave me a shot • You could go in and say, "Look this is how I feel. I feel like I at least deserve a fighting chance." And he would say, "I do too and I'll give you that." • I went in to his office to talk about my playing time and said, "Coach can I talk to you for a sec." And he said, "Sure." So I told him what I thought and he listened and then he gave me a chance (p7)
		Quality of Communication	Honest	• You always felt like coach was really honest with you when discussing playing time or other issues • Coach didn't just tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, they told me the truth • Coach would never say something false. He wouldn't give you false compliments
			Appropriate	• Coach rarely yelled at you. Yelling was only used if it was necessary to get your attention
			No Mixed Messages	• Coach always did what she said she was going to do • Coach never sent mixed messages. Coach would never tell a player, "You're awesome. You're doing great" and then take them out of the starting line-up. That's a mixed message (p9)
			Well Timed	• Coach was good at knowing when to say, "Okay, do your thing." Or he knew when to step in and say, "Okay, I need you to do this." • Coach didn't talk all the time, so when he did talk, you listened • He would only instruct you during the game before or after plays, but never during the actual play so you weren't having to deal with someone in your ear constantly (p6)
			Positive	• I don't think you ever heard a negative word come out of his mouth • Some coaches are completely negative. Everything is bad, bad, bad and for some guys that works, but I would say that for the vast majority, that doesn't fly well (p17)
			Well Articulated	• The coaches that were good leaders did a good job of articulating their points
			Constructive	• You have to have constructive criticism, but you don't want to have a coach that continually bangs on you until you wear down (p2)
			Balanced	• It's okay to have negative points sometimes, but it can't always be negative, there's got to be a balance • If you're always negative, then nobody cares about winning for the coach or they are just out there for themselves or the guys they're playing with... and it makes a big difference when you care about the person you're playing for (p2)

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	MOTIVATE	Content	• Constantly challenged me in practice to work hard and be the best that I could be • In order to get the best out of your players and get them to play hard, you have to touch something inside of them. You have to have some type of attachment with them and if you're able to get that with all of your players, they'll go through walls for you (p8) • It is a grind playing 150 games, so when somebody is able to loosen the atmosphere and have a good time, it gets the players to work hard (p2) • Coach cares and wants us to succeed and that's what really drove everybody to work hard • Coach gave me a vision and told me what I could accomplish if I worked hard • Coach motivated me to learn the game and be the best player that I could be (p10) • He motivated the team to get fired up to play and he definitely made you listen and think about what he was saying (p10) • When you have a coach that is super motivating and just wants to be there, you want to play for them (p5)
		Method	• He was really motivating in the sense that he knew that I was trying so hard to end up being the full time closer and he saw that and... I don't know if he saw so much potential as he saw how hard I worked or how much I wanted it and how hard I was working to get it that he said, "Alright, I'm going to invest time in you to do it." And I think that's motivating in itself when a coach says, "I believe in you too." (p15) • He was really big with telling us where we could go with the game. He said, "I've never really had too many Division I players come through my program, but all four of you could do it if you're willing to commit yourself to doing it. So that was the first time I ever had a coach that was saying, "Hey, you could go to the next level and this is what you can do." (p7) • Gave me something to strive for • I was motivated to please my coach. I never wanted to let him down • I was motivated because I had so much respect for my coach (p10) • If I'm a great coach, I've got to know the guys I can joke around with to make them work harder (p1) • At the end of the season, everyone is worn out physically and mentally. You are just trying to get through [each day] more than anything. When [your coach] is bouncing around and is encouraging and is always saying something, it does carry over and guys see that and get more into the game (p2) • Coach was always upbeat and was never just going through the motions and that carried over to us (p2) • The pre-game speeches were motivational to everyone. You would go out there and just want to leave every ounce of energy that you had out on the field. I don't even know how to explain it (p9) • My coach motivated by creating a competitive practice environment (p7) • You get motivated by people who are passionate about the game (p9) • I think its important to have somebody who you enjoy playing for to kind of go out there and not only are you working for yourself, but you're working for somebody who is trying to do the same thing as we are (p2) • Coach charted everything so that you couldn't go through the motions in practice (p8) • He finds a way to motivate each player and then he does it either by appealing to your emotional side or to play for your teammates or to play because of something the other team said about you. He finds a way to motivate everyone (p9) • He would give me little things. You know, "I saw this player and he does this drill and he wants to make 25 shots before he goes on to the next spot." Just little things like that. Then me being competitive and also wanting to be good... I would say, "Okay, I'm going to do that drill and I'm going to do 30 before I get to the next spot." It makes it a little more believable and also it just gives you something to shoot for (p8). • Could would talk about other great players (p8)

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	PREPARE ATHLETES FOR COMPETITION	Content	Conditioning	• He was big into the physical conditioning, but also conditioning your arm (baseball pitcher) (p15) • Staying in shape was important and coach emphasized that (p16)
			Game-like Practices	• He prepared his teams really well for matches and he did so by how he trained us in practice. Our practices were harder than our matches (p13) • He'd start practice with running us in and out of the dugout for live scrimmage situations
			Mental Preparation	• We trained the mental part of the game • He used to have us go through pitching charts and we used to have to go through every single pitching chart from the game before on each hitter and highlight when they swung through a fastball (were they ahead or behind in the count) (p15) • He got me to that point to where he would say, "Go get loose." I would start to mentally prepare and mentally kind of attach what I was going to do as if, "Okay, this is just the beginning of the game." And if I come in and runners were on, it was really simple, "Okay, great I have runners on or whatever." And then you would do that in practice too (p15)
		Method	Game Plans	• He had all these charts and he planned them all out and it was meticulous (p7) • He was very good at figuring out the tactics to stop an opponent (p7) • Coach did a really good job of getting us game ready (p15) • He had a game plan for every team that we were playing (p10) • Coach always gave you the game plan and how to execute and the players got it done (p1)
			Practice Plans	• He'd go over practice, everything was drawn out and this is what we're doing and this is how we're doing it (p10)
			Teach	• See table above
			Communicate	• See table above
		Quality of Preparation	Meticulous	• There is only so much stuff you can do to execute a game plan but you knew that he had it all broken down, every last number. He had calculated it out (p7) • He was very methodical (p6)
			Consistent	• Whether we were playing in front of 20,000 or 2,000, I don't think you saw a difference in his personality. He didn't prepare differently. His life didn't change. His actions didn't change (p14) • Everything was drawn out… what we were doing and were going to do it and we did it over and over and over and over again until we got it right

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	RESPOND TO ATHLETE BEHAVIORS AND PERFORMANCE	What Coaches Responded To	Player Emotions/Moods	• There were times when I knew I wasn't having a good day in practice and she knew not to ride me. She would work on something else with me. She just knew my moods and knew to kind of back off a little bit (p13) • He got excited about things that he knew we got excited about (p15) • When you lost, it hurt them just as bad as it hurt you. When you won, they were just as excited as you were (p5)
			Player Performance	• When somebody would make a great dig or a great hit or it was a great play, his face literally would light up and he would be the first person to be like, "That's career! That was a career dig." Or "That was your best hit." (p13) • When you talk about what made him smile, what made his face light up, it was when somebody did something that he had been working with (p14) • When we would run a certain play and we would finally get it right, that's when he would grin (p14) • He'd get so excited over little things. We had a couple of guys that were struggling to get hits and when they got a hit, he would jump off his seat... he used to get really excited about things like that (p15) • Coach didn't just get excited over the goals, but he got excited about a great defensive tackle or a defensive header. The things that were not glorious, but selfless (p9) • Feedback would be, "Even follow through... You're feet aren't under the ball... Pinch on your follow though." (p13) • And the things that he reacts to in practice. If the coach just stands there and watches, you never know if you're doing something right and let's say you make an awesome slide tackle and the coach is just cheering you on. It's nice for coaches to show a little bit of emotion and not be so stoic that they can't be human as well (p9) • If a player is better than he was a month ago, that made him happy. I think that's where he got his enjoyment (p14)
			Laziness or Lack of Effort	• He would not tolerate laziness and lack of effort. That was a pretty big thing (p12) • Coach had zero patience for people who wouldn't work hard and he made that very clear at the beginning that if you weren't working hard that he would not hesitate to pull you out (p12) • The only thing that coach would not tolerate was laziness and lack of effort (p12)
			Mental Mistakes	• Coach encouraged taking chances and didn't punish mistakes (p12) • He said, "Everybody has a dream to play in the big leagues. Nobody wants to strike out. Nobody wants to make an error. So I'll never criticize you about that. Those things happen." When he gets upset was if you made a mental mistake (p2) • He gets upset about mental mistakes: not paying attention, missing signals, not giving effort (p2) • It wasn't physical errors that we had to run for so much as it was mental errors (p2)

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level Two	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	RESPOND TO ATHLETE BEHAVIORS AND PERFORMANCE *(continued)*	What Coaches Responded To *(continued)*	Physical Mistakes	• Coach would let you work through a couple physical mistakes. This allows you to play more relaxed (p6) • You had a margin for error. If you're playing your hardest, you are going to make mistakes, it's inevitable. So having a coach that would allow room for error was fine (p6) • "We're going to respect the game. I don't care if you go out there and make an error, throw a ball away, I'll never get on you for that." (p2) • Coach encouraged you to be aggressive and wouldn't take you out if you made one mistake being aggressive (p6) • He would throw people in crazy situations and he would encourage aggressiveness (p7) • Both of my coaches would encourage you to take chances and they didn't punish you if you made a mistake (p12) • I think people respond right away, or at least I did, "Oh gosh, I messed up" and start getting all tense and you play tight, but coach would calmly talk to you about the specifics of what you did wrong or not so much what you did wrong, but "Hey, try this" and would give you the little tools to fix it. Then you're not thinking about what you did wrong, but you're thinking about the next play and what you're going to do to fix that (p13)
		Quality of Responses	Constructive	• Feedback was always stated in a constructive way • You have to have the constructive criticism, but you don't want to have the guy continually band on you until you wear down (p2)
			Positive	• It wasn't, "Ah, you're slow." It was, "Faster feet" (p13) • He would correct the problem, not create more of a problem in your head by yelling at you and making you nervous. He would really help you fix the issue
			Specific	• He wouldn't get mad at you or yell at you for not doing it right. He would tell you what to do or what not to do. He would say, "Okay, turn your hand in a little bit like this and move in a foot." (p13)
			Constant	• There was constant feedback, but it wasn't in a negative way, it was just there (p13)

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIONS	PERFORM UNDER PRESSURE	Calm	• When kids are in a game and they are still 18-25 year olds, they're going to be way more excited and pumped up and everything and I think the coach's level of calmness just brought that back down a little bit. We're never going to be on his level because we have too much adrenaline and testosterone, but the fact that he was down 10 levels maybe brought us down 2 levels to where we needed to be because we're still playing within the excitement of the game and the crowd. I think that brought us down just enough to be able to play within our game and not get too excited about what was going on (p6) • He had a relaxed demeanor. You always felt a sense of calmness around him and when you're in a gym of 8,000 people screaming and the last thing on your mind is what's going on in the stands. You're playing within the game and you're on the court and you're coach is very calm and looking at you and not yelling and talking and he's looking around and reading his notes and just etching out the details and I think it really carries over into the team (p6) • If player emotions started taking off, the could would call a time out and you would come over and he was very calming and it kind of hit a rest button on you to be able to go back out on the court and perform and be calmed down because when you're in a too excited state of mind that's when you can start making errors (p6) • Other coaches are emotional and want to win and forget to relax and execute, but my coach stayed calm and in the zone (p4)
		Emotionally Steady	• She never blew up unless she wanted too. She doesn't freak out (p4) • Her true gift is that in the heat of the battle, she is the rock: calm comforting, confident, direct and to the point (p4) • In these moments, there is no emotion to coach. It's business and there's a mission and you take care of business (p4) • Coach wasn't emotionally elevated, didn't get excited, never really got too up and down and was pretty steady all the time and I think it really kind of calmed my mind. He had a level head on and that's what I would try to follow by example (p6) • Having the coach be more of a steady figure gave the whole team a comfort level to know that it was never going to get out of control (p6)
		Confident	• She never shows fear. She never shows her uneasiness or nervousness (p4) • Coach always emits confidence • The guy is not afraid (p7)
		Clear	• The communication was direct and to the point. She chooses her words wisely. Her voice is not soft, but loud and everything is matter of fact (p4)
		Prepared	• She never does any sort of a call under pressure that the team hasn't seen 100 times (p4) • The more preparation, the less stressful you're going to be in pressure situations because you've already done the work. The key is that coach already has everything in the playbook. She never drew up a new play when the game was on the line (p4) • If you already have everything put in then there is much less chance for error. Players know exactly where they are supposed to be (p4) • It's being able to pull out one more trick, but can you pull out a trick that you already have (p4)

Table 6 *(continued)*

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Coaching Actions

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
COACHING ACTIOMS	DISREGARD THE IRRELEVANT	Coach Saw The Bigger Picture	• Coaches who over-coach and get too nitpicky about the details have rubbed me the wrong way. This coach kind of looked at the big picture and would let the little things go sometimes (p6) • He just had the idea of the bigger picture. As a freshman, he doesn't sit there and pull you in and tell you about nit picky things (p3) • He was a brilliant man in terms of vision of what he sees not in the here and now, but in the future (p13)
			• If you were wiped out and needed a day off, he would give you a day off (p2) • If you were over 30, you conditioned in your own way. You're old enough to know what you need to do to stay in shape to be able to play and you're going to do it (p1)
			• Both of those coaches were so focused on what their teams did. "What am I getting out of my point guard? What am I getting out of this defense?" (p14) • My dad was so obsessed with what we were going to do that he never even scouted. His point was that it doesn't matter what they do, it matters what we do (p14) • My coaches were so obsessed with what their teams did and less about what the opponent did (p14)
			• Practice was self-motivated and there was no punishment for drills because nobody needed to convince anybody that losing was bad, everybody knew it (p7) • Even like the way that we'd run drills. If you lost a drill there is a consequence for it and you run lines, but at my school it wasn't like that. If you lose a drill, you lose a drill and then you move on and I always felt like there was a lot of maturity involved in that whole program (p7)
			• He loved the individuality of the guys. I think he really enjoyed that. I think so many coaches want everyone to be the same and I think he actually really enjoyed the guys that were really different. He really got a kick out of them (p7) • He didn't care one iota about how you dressed, whether you were shaven or unshaven, hair long, hair short, bandannas... nothing mattered to him, but how you played the game (p7) • He let us play the game. There was no BS. Nobody told us how we were supposed to look and nobody told us what time we were supposed to... we knew what time we were supposed to show up and nobody told us what time we had to go to bed on the road. He understood the realities of the game (p7) • We didn't need some sort of consequence for losing because the real deal was trying to get on the court. It didn't matter who won or lost because he would evaluate us. So you're playing really hard just to impress him (p7)
			• If you missed the flight, the ticket is at the game and no bologna (p7)

Table 7

Thematic Structure for Athlete Experiences of Great Coaching – Influences

	General Theme	Sub Theme Level One	Meaning Units
INFLUENCES	INFLUENCES	Self-Perceptions	• Made me feel comfortable (p13) • Built my confidence • Motivated me • Made me want to win for him and make him proud (p6) • He always made me feel better (p3) • Makes you want to go out there and do a good job and play hard every day (p16) • Made me want to listen and learn (p4) • Gained my respect (p8)
		Development	• I learned so much quickly and the next year it was the same thing, but at a higher level • Playing for this coach was about more than just becoming a better athlete, but it was about becoming a better person • Every great coach, at some level, you get something from about being a better person in society
		Performance	• It was almost like he put faith in people and people would perform (p7) • He made me better with the technique things (p5) • He looks at you and talks to you like you are going to do well, so you do • What made him great was the state of mind that I could be in when I was on the court playing for him... not worried • For whatever reason, I think I maybe played a little bit above myself because I wanted to win so bad because of the amount of help he gave me • Coach consistently gets more out of his players than what is expected • I think he maximized my athletic ability. There are coaches that get players that are so athletic that they don't know how to train them. Then you get kids that are maybe not as athletic that will run through walls for you and you develop and you train them and you get them better. He just has a way of maximizing everybody's athletic ability and emotions (p13)

VITA

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