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**Preferred Sporting Environment and Coaching Behaviours:
Perspectives From Canadian High School Athletes**

**Préférences par rapport à l'environnement sportif
et aux comportements de l'entraîneur:
Points de vue d'athlètes canadiens du secondaire**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the sporting environment and coaching behaviours preferred by Canadian high school athletes. Thirty athletes (23 boys, 7 girls) between the ages of 13 and 18 years (M=16.2; SD=1.45) participated in individual semi-structured interviews lasting between 19 and 39 minutes (M=28). Participants were asked to describe what type of environment they believe should be fostered in high school sport and to indicate what constitutes effective versus ineffective coaches in this context. The software NVivo was used to organise the data, which was analysed through a content analysis. Results indicated that most athletes prefer an environment that promotes participation and development and coaches who are supportive, knowledgeable about the sport they are coaching, that prioritise athlete development, and are good motivators. Conversely, athletes believed high school sport should not prioritise competition and ineffective coaches were seen as those who offer little or no support, prioritise winning, are not organised, and have limited knowledge of the sport they are coaching. Results are discussed using models of coaching and the coaching science literature.

Résumé

Cette étude visait à cerner les préférences de jeunes athlètes canadiens du secondaire par rapport à l'environnement sportif et aux comportements des entraîneurs. Pour ce faire, des entrevues semi-dirigées d'une durée de 19 à 39 minutes (M=28) chacune ont eu lieu avec trente athlètes (23 garçons et 7 filles) de 13 à 18 ans (M=16,2; ET=1,45). Les chercheurs ont demandé aux participants de décrire leur type d'environnement sportif préféré et d'expliquer ce qui rend un entraîneur compétent ou incompétent à leurs yeux. Ils ont eu recours au logiciel NVivo pour organiser les données, qui ont été ensuite décortiquées au moyen d'une analyse de contenu. Les résultats ont révélé que la plupart des athlètes du secondaire préfèrent évoluer dans un environnement

sportif qui encourage la participation et le développement, et qu'ils aiment mieux côtoyer des entraîneurs positifs qui ont une grande connaissance du sport dont ils sont responsables, qui accordent beaucoup d'importance au développement des athlètes et qui savent comment les motiver. Par contre, les athlètes étaient d'avis qu'au secondaire, les sports devraient être moins compétitifs et jugeaient incompétents les entraîneurs qui offraient rarement ou jamais de soutien, qui étaient obsédés par l'idée de gagner, qui étaient désorganisés et qui ne connaissaient pas bien le sport dont ils étaient responsables. Dans cet article, les chercheurs discutent des résultats à partir de modèles d'entraînement et de documentation sur l'art de l'entraînement.

Introduction

Coaches play a significant role in the sporting environment (Gould & Carson, 2008) and have even been identified as having, along with teachers, the strongest non-parental influence on youth (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). The behaviours of coaches determine the quality of their coaching and ultimately the positive or negative experiences athletes can derive from sport (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005). In order to maximise positive experiences for athletes, coaches: "have a responsibility first to understand sport's significance in society and second to seek to reproduce the very best aspects of this practice" (Kirk, 2010, p.174). To efficiently use sport's potential to foster positive development, Jones (2006) argued that sports coaching needs to be reconceptualised and coaches must not only be viewed as physical trainers but as educators who develop athletes. The coaching environment must be framed as a learning context that allows athletes to be fully realised. In essence, rather than instruct, coaches have to educate and the act of coaching should be viewed as a: "holistic developmental activity connected with a wider set of beliefs about social learning" (Jones, 2006, p.5).

In order to effectively educate athletes in a holistic manner, Côté and Gilbert (2009) argued that it is necessary for coaches to integrate various forms of knowledge, understand the context in which they operate, and work towards the positive development of their athletes. Thus, to coach effectively is a complex process due to the dynamic and social nature of the act of coaching (Cushion, 2010). To better understand the coaching process, a number of coaching models have been developed over the years that focus on the outcomes of coach and athlete interactions (Côté, Bruner, Erickson, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2010). Such models include the multidimensional model of leadership (Chelladurai, 1984), the coaching model (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russel, 1995), and more recently the model of expert coaches' perspective on building successful programs (Vallée & Bloom, 2005).

Chelladurai's (1984) model was the first sport-specific model of leadership to explain the satisfaction and performance of athletes. According to the model, athlete satisfaction and performance are influenced by three states of coaches' behaviours: (a) actual behaviours, (b) athletes' preferred behaviours, and (c) required behaviours. These three types of leadership behaviours are in turn influenced by the characteristics of athletes, coaches, and the environment. The model's usefulness resides in how it considers that coaching success is not only related to great leadership skills but also to a coach's ability to meet a

combination of demands and to incorporate required and preferred behaviours in their actual behaviours (Côté et al., 2010)

The coaching model (CM) was developed using a grounded theory approach to better understand how coaches conceptualise their work and tasks (Côté et al., 1995). According to the model, coaches work towards their objectives by establishing a mental model of their athletes' potential. The CM is made up of six components that can be divided into two levels of variables. Competition, training, and organisation are variables that represent actual coaching behaviours while athletes' characteristics, coaches' characteristics, and the context are variables that affect coaching behaviours (Côté et al., 2010). The act of coaching consists of taking into account these variables and working to develop athletes, both inside and outside of sport, by planning training and helping athletes acquire skills (Côté et al., 1995).

Vallée and Bloom (2005) proposed a conceptual model of how coaches can build successful sport programs. The model was developed through a study conducted with Canadian university coaches. According to the model, four components (i.e., coaches' attributes, individual growth, organisational skills, and having a vision) are necessary for building successful programs. As it relates to attributes, coaches should be committed to continuously learn, be open-minded, be genuinely interested in their athletes, and self-evaluate. Coaches who display great organisational skills also drive successful programs and coaches who teach their athletes competencies, recognize the importance of academics, and communicate effectively. Finally, coaches of successful programs are those who have a vision and set high standards to facilitate the holistic development of their athletes.

These models share common elements in that effective coaching is said to require that coaches take into consideration a wide range of factors and also necessitates that they work to facilitate the holistic development of their athletes. An important factor coaches must consider is the particular environment in which sport is practiced because it can greatly influence the behaviours they are required to display and the behaviours athletes expect them to display (Chelladurai, 1984). One particular environment, high school sport, specifically requires that coaches work to develop in their athletes competencies that promote their holistic development. Kirk (2010) indicated how the school sport environment differs from other contexts such as club sport because: "Schools do more than teach sports, while sports clubs have a very specialised and particular focus" (p.173). This is particularly true in Canada where high school sport has been framed as a context that should do more than just teach sports. In fact, according to the Canadian School Sport Federation (2004), the mission of high school sport in Canada consists of: "encouraging, promoting and being an advocate for good sportsmanship, citizenship and the total development of student athletes through interscholastic sport" (p.4).

Although researchers have developed models and school sport federations have developed mission statements communicating how coaches should coach and how the sporting environment should be structured, there is sparse information available concerning the sporting environment and coaching behaviours that are preferred by high school athletes. If, as Jones (2006) argued, coaching is to be reconceptualised as an activity that enables athletes to reach their full potential, then it is essential to determine what athletes themselves

believe constitutes a suitable sporting environment as well as appropriate coaching behaviours. Cassidy, Jones, and Potrac (2004) indicated that the degree o which coaches behave in a manner that is perceived by athletes to be appropriate largely determines the overall benefits of their interactions. If coaches meet athletes' expectations, positive outcomes should result; however, when expectations are not met, dissatisfaction and a counterproductive environment can ensue.

In recent years, some studies have examined athletes' experiences in sport and how coaches have influenced those experiences (see Table 1). A few of these studies were conducted with adolescents but none have been found to specifically examine the context of high school sport. Generally, the results of these studies indicate that athletes believe effective coaches are those who are knowledgeable about the sport they were coaching, are good communicators, and put athletes' needs first. Conversely, athletes believe ineffective coaches are those who lack knowledge and experience, are poor communicators, and do not demonstrate that they care for their athletes. Although these studies offer valuable information to researchers and practitioners alike, it is essential to extend previous research and to specifically examine the perspective of athletes in the high school context.

Table 1
Sample of recent studies on athletes' perspective of coaching

Authors	Participants	Effective Coaches	Ineffective Coaches
Roy et al. (2002) (Canada)	University athletes	Foster positive relationships Have knowledge Credible	Foster negative relationships Lack knowledge/experience
Cassidy et al. (2004) (New Zealand)	Undergraduate students	Knowledgeable Good motivators Good communicators Organised	

Table 1 continued

Authors	Participants	Effective Coaches	Ineffective Coaches
Dworkin and Larson (2006) (USA)	Adolescents		Display favouritism Disrespectful Place unreasonable demands Lack knowledge
Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008) (Canada)	Adolescent swimmers	Supportive Good communication skills Offer one-on-one coaching	Ignore weaker athletes Are highly critical Intimidating
Becker (2009) (USA)	Elite/professional athletes	Knowledgeable Approachable Athlete-centred	
Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009) (Canada)	Adolescent swimmers	Good communicators High expectations Constructive feedback	Poor communicators Display favouritism Intimidating
Gearity (2009) (USA)	Collegiate/professional athletes		Not teaching Unfair Uncaring Inhibiting Coping

Gould and Carson (2008) argued that more context-specific research is needed in sport given that: "One weakness with the existing research is that participation in sport has been viewed as a single entity. However, youth sport programs vary greatly in terms of their goals, structure and whom they involve" (p.70). Indeed, as previously indicated, high school sport has specific mandates and objectives that differ from those of other contexts (Kirk, 2010). That is why it is important to examine what are athletes' preferences in this particular context. Studies focusing on high school sport are also warranted given the popularity of sport participation in this context. Statistics indicate that over 750 000 athletes in Canada practice high school sport (Canadian School Sport Federation, 2008) and research conducted with athletes can increase our understanding of the dynamics of participation in this particular environment. Taking into account this information, the purpose of this study was to examine high school athletes' preferred sporting environment and coaching behaviours. Two research questions guided this study: (a) What type of environment do athletes believe should be fostered in high school sport? and (b) What do athletes believe constitute the behaviours of effective versus ineffective coaches in high school sport? A qualitative methodology was employed to answer the two research questions as it allows researchers to develop in-depth explanations of particular events by emphasizing the importance of the context and the beliefs held by participants (Maxwell, 2004). A qualitative methodology was also used because it allows researchers to examine the underlying reasons behind an object of study and renders itself appropriate to understand how participants make meaning of a situation (Merriam, 2002). Gaining insight into underlying reasons was particularly important in this study as understanding the type of environment preferred by athletes helps explain in large part the behaviours they favour in their coaches given that coaches are greatly responsible for cultivating the sporting environment. Examining these two questions from an athlete's perspective is an important exercise as athletes are inevitably the ones who directly practice sport and should have their voices heard. Such findings can reveal if high school athletes' preferences for sporting environment and coaching behaviours coincide with the views held by researchers and communicated by school sport federations. Coaches can also use these findings to frame their coaching practices and the sport environment according to athletes' preferences and needs.

Method

Participants

A total of 30 high school athletes (23 boys, 7 girls) from the provinces of Quebec and Ontario in Canada voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. All participants are Caucasian and those from Quebec spoke French as a first language while those from Ontario spoke English as a first language. Athletes were recruited in different types of schools (i.e., public schools, vocational schools, private schools) and needed to have been involved in high school sport for at least one year in order to be eligible to participate in this study. Athletes ranged in age from 13 to 18 years (M = 16.2; SD = 1.45). Twenty-six students were from Quebec and four were from Ontario. Participants were involved in the

sports of wrestling (n = 1), basketball (n = 2), soccer (*n = 5*), volleyball (n = 6), and ice hockey (n = 16).

Context

High school sports in Canada are offered to boys and girls who have the option of practicing many team and individual sports. High school sports are usually practiced after school hours and athletes/teams participate in organised competitive leagues that lead to annual regional and provincial championships. In Ontario, high school sport seasons are typically only a few months long and athletes have the option to participate in many sports over the course of their four-year high school career. The province of Quebec has a different system as students spend five years in high school. In addition, sport seasons are longer in Quebec (six to eight months) and athletes usually practice only one sport during the academic year (Lacroix, Camiré, & Trudel, 2008). Traditionally, high school sport teams in Canada have been overseen by school teachers who volunteer their time to coach, however, in certain contexts; coaches from the community are solicited to fill vacant coaching positions due to a lack of teacher volunteers (Camiré, Trudel, & Lemyre, 2011). Whether they are teachers or from the community, high school coaches are encouraged to acquire certifications from the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP). It is important to note that coaching certifications are not mandatory in this context.

Procedure

All 30 athletes took part in individual semi-structured interviews. Athletes were recruited using a snowball sampling procedure (Miles & Huberman, 1994) through their coaches (nine males, one female) who were participating in another research project headed by the first author. After having participated in interviews themselves, coaches were asked by the researcher if they had athletes who would be willing to take part in a study on their participation in high school sport. Coaches were asked, when possible, to select athletes with varying backgrounds (e.g., starters, reserves, players of different positions). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that coaches did not at any point have access to the questions in the athlete interview guide. The researcher contacted athletes who agreed to participate in order to make meeting arrangements. In accordance with the researcher's University Ethics Board, athletes signed a consent form and those under the age of consent also had to get a parent or legal guardian to sign a consent form. Prior to each interview, athletes were told that their participation was voluntary and were explained the measures taken to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews with athletes from Quebec were conducted in French while interviews with athletes from Ontario were conducted in English. All interviews were conducted in person by the first author, who is fully bilingual, either at the participant's school or home using a digital audio recorder. All interviews were conducted at the end of the school year when all sport seasons were completed to avoid having athletes feel like their involvement in this study would influence their sport participation or their relationship with their coach.

Interview guide

   The interview guide was composed of three sections: (a) demographics, (b) participation in high school sport, and (c) coaching. The first section was used to gather basic information about the athletes such as their age, school grade, and sport(s) practiced and also to build rapport. In the second section, athletes were asked to discuss various aspects of their participation in high school sport. Examples of questions include: (a) According to you, what is the purpose of having sports in schools? and (b) Describe how you believe high school sports should be practiced? In the third section, questions centred on coaches as athletes were asked to describe their coaching preferences in the context of high school sport. Questions were posed to athletes in the following manner: (a) Can you describe what the ideal high school coach is, according to you? and (b) Can you describe what is ineffective coaching in the high school context? In order to gather rich details from the athletes, probing was regularly employed during the interview process. Probes were used to help athletes clarify ideas and further elaborate on specific themes. For example, the researcher asked probes such as: (a) Can you elaborate on what aspects of sport participation you believe should be prioritised in the high school environment? and (b) Can you further describe what you believe high school coaches should focus their efforts on? Interviews with athletes ranged from 19 to 39 minutes (M = 28).

Data analysis

   The 30 interviews were transcribed verbatim resulting in 347 pages of single-spaced text. Analysis began by reading the transcripts in order to get a general sense of the data. Each transcript was then downloaded into the software NVivo 8 (NVivo, 2008) which was used to assist in organising the information. A thematic analysis was conducted to examine the data, essentially consisting of breaking the data into meaning units and clustering similar meaning units together to form themes and categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In relation to preferred high school sport environment, meaning units were organised in two general themes: 'participation' and 'competition'. As it relates to what athletes believe high school coaches should focus on, two other general themes emerged: 'development of athletes' and 'winning'. As for athletes' perspectives on effective and ineffective coaching behaviours, meaning units were organised in numerous themes such as 'lack of positive reinforcement', 'organised', and 'favouritism'. Given the large number of themes related to coaching behaviours, similar themes were reviewed and were combined to form higher-order categories. For example, the themes 'lack of positive reinforcement' and 'negative attitude' were combined to form the higher-order category entitled 'not supportive'. Similarly, 'places unreasonable demands', 'does not distribute playing time equally', and 'displays favouritism' were combined to form 'prioritises winning'. In total, six categories representing effective coaching behaviours and four categories representing ineffective coaching behaviours were developed.   To increase the trustworthiness of the findings, investigator triangulation was performed by having a peer with extensive experience in qualitative research involved throughout the analytical process. The peer helped the researcher develop and organise themes and categories and ensured that the researcher's interpretations were accurate and reflected the data. The quotes used from the French interviews were translated in English by the first author and care

was taken to protect the integrity of participants' ideas. Finally, codes were used to represent the athletes (e.g., ninth athlete interviewed = A9) in order to protect the participants' identity.

Results

The results are presented in four sections. The first section examines if athletes prefer an environment promoting participation or competition while the second section explores if athletes prefer coaches who prioritise development or winning. The third and fourth sections present what athletes believe are effective (six themes) versus ineffective (four themes) coaching behaviours.

Preferred high school sport environment

In the interviews, athletes were asked to describe how they believe high school sports should be practiced. Nearly all of the athletes believed that an environment promoting participation should be prioritised over an environment promoting competition in this context. An athlete stated everyone should have an equal chance to play in order to promote pleasure for all: "At school, I think they should encourage everyone to participate. This way, everyone can have fun and it is not necessarily the best players that have all the playing time" (A10). For another athlete, participation should be promoted because high school sports should be about allowing athletes to interact socially: "I think school sport should be more about participation. You participate to have fun with your friends. That is the goal. If you want competition, you go to a higher level like club sports" (A3). Nonetheless, a few athletes did mention that a competitive environment should be favoured. An athlete stated how competition is what motivates him to engage in sport: "I am really competitive. I would not like to just play for fun. It [competition] gives me an objective and it drives me to push myself. For me, it is more competition than participation" (A2). Interestingly, several athletes had nuanced perspectives and suggested how both participation and competition can be inherent components of high school sport, as long as a balance is found and participation remains a priority. For example, an athlete mentioned:

> A balance is required between the two. For sure there needs to be competition. You need to try your hardest but at a certain point, you also need to have fun and participate. If you really want to play competitive, then go play on a club team. At school, it is more for fun. Like this year, we had a good team and we pushed hard to compete but participation always remained important. (A1)

What coaches should prioritise

To help create an appropriate sporting environment, athletes were asked to state what they believe should be the priority of high school coaches. The majority of athletes stated that coaches should promote the development of athletes over winning games and/or championships. An athlete stated that through sport, coaches should teach their athletes lessons that will prepare them for life beyond sport: "I think it should be about the development of athletes. If we win, it is fun but it is clear that coaches need to prepare us for our future and not just to win" (A10). Another athlete talked about some of the benefits that can be derived from having coaches who create an environment that promotes development: "In sport, we can express ourselves. If you are shy in class but good in sport, it allows

you to develop confidence. By [coaches] focusing on development, it allows us to expand our horizons" (A9). Interestingly, an athlete compared school sport to club sport and mentioned preferring the school context because he believes coaches on club teams focus too much on winning: "For sure school sport helps develop people. It can be a motivation for school. In club sport, I played much less. They [coaches] were more focused on winning and I did not like it" (A4). Only a couple of athletes mentioned that high school coaches should promote winning over development. For example, an athlete said: "For sure winning is important. Winning has become really important. Winning occupies a big place in sport" (A18).

Effective coaching behaviours

After having discussed the type of environment that should be promoted, athletes were asked to elaborate on the behaviours that represent effective coaches. A number of behaviours were reported and were organised into five general themes.

Supportive. A majority of the athletes indicated that they prefer a high school coach who is supportive. For example, two athletes stated: "The coach I prefer would be not too pushy. If you make a mistake, he says 'Keep trying, do not give up' instead of saying 'You can't do better than that? Are you weak?'" (A13) and "He needs to be positive. If you make a mistake, he will correct you and show you how to not make that mistake again and support you" (A3).

Knowledgeable. Many athletes also felt that an effective coach is someone who is knowledgeable about the sport he/she is coaching. Athletes indicated how they prefer a coach who has playing experience in the sport he or she is coaching and someone with sufficient pedagogical skills to teach the sport in a manner that allows athletes to improve. Two athletes indicated that: "He needs to have played soccer and have some experience and knowledge. It is not fun when you have a coach that you could almost coach in his place" (A1) and "I think he needs to have played at a somewhat high level. Someone with experience who can teach you things you do not already know. Someone who is good at explaining too" (A9).

Prioritise athlete development. A number of participants provided responses indicating that they believe an effective coach is someone who prioritises athlete development. According to several participants, one way for coaches to demonstrate that they prioritise development is to establish meaningful relationships with their athletes. An athlete stated: "He needs to be able to create a good connection with his athletes outside of the court. He is friendly and talks to us about anything. He can give us his passion for sport" (A17). Another athlete suggested that coaches who prioritise development must set the example for appropriate behaviour: "He needs to be a role model for us. He must be able to control himself in front of referees and the other teams" (A19). Other athletes discussed how high school coaches should teach more than just sport-specific skills. One particular athlete stated: "It is someone who is able to really teach you and show you what life is all about and what is waiting for you after school" (A24). Finally, some athletes felt an effective coach is someone who prioritises academic achievement and recognises that school must come before sport. An athlete said: "He makes sure the team gets to classes and goes to school. The

coach has to have the right idea. If kids do not go to class, they should not have the right to play" (A13).

Motivator. An effective coach was also perceived by many to be a good motivator, someone who can inspire athletes to work hard and fulfil their potential in all of life's domains. Two athletes mentioned: "It is a person that pushes you to your maximum and knows when to use the abilities you have. To know what to do in the right moment" (A21) and "For me, an ideal coach, it would be someone that pushes you. I like it when someone explains things and inspires me to improve. It helps me progress" (A9).

Demanding and challenging. For a few athletes, an effective coach is someone who is fair but demanding and challenging. For example, an athlete stated: "At the beginning, you might say 'this coach is relentless' but that coach will make you improve the most. Years later, you will say 'I am glad I had that coach and because of him, I am here today'" (A22).

Organised. Finally, a small number of participants mentioned that an effective coach is someone who is organised. An athlete said: "He must be able to manage and to control his athletes. To be in control of what is happening on and off the ice" (A21).

Ineffective coaching behaviours

Athletes discussed a wide range of behaviours that represent ineffective coaches. These behaviours have been organised and are presented in four general themes.

Not supportive. A majority of participants provided answers indicating that they believe an ineffective coach in the context of high school sport is someone who is not supportive. For many athletes, this meant a coach who is always angry and does not provide any positive reinforcement. For example, an athlete said: "He yells at the kids for no reason. He is always negative and discouraging. If you make a bad play, he yells at you. If you make a good play, he does nothing to encourage you" (A17). For other athletes, an ineffective coach is someone who is not there when athletes are in need. Two athletes answered: "A bad coach is someone who does not care for his athletes. He is never available for us. When we need advice, he does not provide any. He always screams without telling us why" (A30) and "He is not there for the girls and boys that play basketball. He does not encourage them. He does not explain. He simply looks at you play and does nothing" (A9). Finally, an athlete indicated how coaches who are not supportive can decrease athletes' motivation to participate in sport: "Let's say you make an error and he sends you to the bench. It does not give you an opportunity to develop in the sport that you love. Without support, it does not make you want to continue to play" (A3).

Prioritise winning. Rather than prioritise athlete development, the majority of participants believed that ineffective coaches are those who exhibit behaviours demonstrating that they prioritise winning. For some athletes, this meant coaches who use athletes as a means to an end. An athlete said: "Someone who does not care about his players. He views them as numbers. His personal interests come before those of the team and he neglects athletes for performance. I do not think it is the right thing to do" (A29). For others, an ineffective coach places unreasonable demands and pushes athletes beyond their capabilities. Two athletes answered: "When a coach puts too much pressure on you because he wants to

win, then he is not paying attention to the well-being of his athletes, to the development of his athletes" (A11) and "A bad coach makes the athletes feel pressured. The athletes feel that their best is not good enough and that the coach does not appreciate their hard work" (A16). According to a few athletes, an ineffective coach is also someone who displays favouritism as it relates to playing time in order to win. An athlete stated: "I see it as a coach who has his favourite players on the team. A coach who always plays the same players and does not give other players an opportunity to develop" (A26).

Not organised. Ineffective coaches were also perceived by a number of athletes as people who are not organised. Two athletes asserted: "It is a coach who puts together his practices at the last minute and who does not arrive on time for matches" (A25) and "He does not really organise his things. During practices, we are pretty much left to ourselves" (A10).

Not knowledgeable. Finally, a few athletes stated that ineffective coaches are those who do not have the necessary knowledge to teach the sport they are coaching. An athlete mentioned: "He does not know his hockey. During practices, we do not progress. The team stays at the same level with no improvements. He does not know what to say or what to do. That is a really bad coach" (A22).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the sporting environment and coaching behaviours preferred by high school athletes. Results indicate that athletes prefer an environment that promotes participation and development over competition and winning and believe effective coaches are: (a) supportive, (b) knowledgeable, (c) centred on athlete development, (d) good motivators, (e) demanding and challenging, and (f) organised. Conversely, athletes believe ineffective coaches are: (a) not supportive, (b) focused on winning, (c) not organised, and (d) not knowledgeable. Athletes in the past research presented in Table 1 also cited many of the coaching behaviours identified in this study. As a result, it appears that some coaching behaviours (e.g. being supportive, having a positive approach) have universal appeal and are preferred by athletes involved in a wide range of sporting environments and levels. Such results confirm that coaches in all contexts must offer adequate support and work to develop meaningful relationships with their athletes (Camiré, Forneris, Trudel, & Bernard, 2011). It is by nurturing relationships that are based on compassion and respect that coaches can gain their athletes' trust and can have a lasting and positive influence on their development. The worth of this study lies in how it provided a voice to high school athletes as they shared concrete examples of preferred behaviours that, according to Chelladurai's (1984) multidimensional model of leadership, coaches should work to integrate in their actual behaviours in order to increase athletes' satisfaction in sport.

Although athletes prefer some coaching behaviours across contexts, Gould and Carson (2008) discussed the importance of not viewing sport as a single entity and how researchers must take into consideration the differences of diverse sporting environments. The current study acknowledged this recommendation by specifically examining the context of high school sport in Canada and it is important to highlight some of the unique and significant findings. First, it was interesting to note how some athletes believed an effective high school coach is

someone who uses sport to teach athletes more than just sport skills but also important life lessons. This has previously only been reported by athletes in a few studies (e.g., Becker, 2009) and suggests that high school athletes have a particularly good understanding of the greater role that school sport should play in the lives of youth, a mandate that differs from that of other contexts such as club sport (Canadian School Sport Federation, 2004; Kirk, 2010). Indeed, in Canada, high school sport programs are often justified based on their educational value (Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008) and because coaches hold a position of considerable influence (Petitpas et al., 2005), they have a responsibility to use the potential of sport to facilitate athletes' holistic development.

Second, it was also of note how a number of athletes mentioned that an effective coach is someone who understands the importance of prioritising academic achievement. These results are in line with Vallée and Bloom's (2005) model and illustrate how coaches in academic institutions have an obligation to foster athletes' individual growth on the playing surface but most importantly in the classroom. This is an important factor for high school coaches to consider as athletes' eligibility to participate in school sport is often tied to their academic performance. However, as the athletes in this study indicated, high school coaches should do more than simply ensure that their athletes meet the minimum criteria to participate in sport. Ideally, coaches should be in regular contact with school teachers in order to support their athletes' academic performance. As Jones (2006) argued, coaches must view themselves as educators of youth and must work to foster a learning environment that allows athletes to be fully realised not just in sport but in all areas of life.

Third, many participants in this study indicated that ineffective coaches are those who exhibit behaviours demonstrating that they prioritise winning (e.g. place unreasonable demands, display favouritism, do not distribute playing time equally). These behaviours have been reported in past research (see Table 1) but the original contribution of the current study lies in how it sheds light on the underlying reasons as to why high school athletes particularly dislike such coaching behaviours. Specifically, results showed how high school athletes consider that competition and winning should not take precedence over participation and athlete development. These findings support past research, demonstrating that young athletes primarily enter the realm of sport not necessarily to win but to be active, to have fun, and to participate with their friends (Garcia Bengoechea, Strean, & Williams, 2004). Kirk (2010), citing Daryl Siedentop, stated: "children would rather play on a losing team where they had their fair share of field time than sit on the bench of a winning team" (p.173). As highlighted in the coaching model (Côté et al., 1995) the ultimate goal of coaching consists of developing athletes and this goal can be achieved when coaches consider contextual factors, their own characteristics, as well as athletes' characteristics. Therefore, it is recommended that high school coaches: (a) understand the specific mandates of the context in which they operate, (b) reflect on their coaching practice and focus their efforts on offering a pleasant sporting experience to all their athletes, and (c) know their athletes' limits and capabilities.

Fourth, it is essential to mention that the most popular responses provided by the athletes of this study were that they prefer coaches who display supportive behaviours and dislike coaches who do not display supportive behaviours. In order to adequately support athletes' participation in sport, Camiré et al. (2011)

suggested that coaches start by taking time to articulate a well thought-out philosophy. This can be achieved by reflecting on essential questions such as: What do I want my athletes to derive from sport? and Are my athletes having positive experiences in sport? Then, to put into practice an athlete-centred philosophy and a supportive structure, it is recommended that coaches display behaviours such as: (a) making themselves available to their athletes, (b) getting to know their athletes on a personal level, (c) providing athletes with constructive feedback, (d) refraining from using derogatory comments, and (e) giving athletes equal opportunities to participate. Recommendations can also be extended to school administrators who should, for example, focus their efforts on recruiting competent coaches who are knowledgeable about the sport they are coaching and most importantly, who have a proven track-record of prioritising development and of making athletes feel supported and appreciated.

Overall, the strength of this study lies in how it provides athletes with a voice to share their preferences regarding participation in high school sport in Canada. By asking athletes to discuss not only their preferred coaching behaviours but also how they believe the environment should be structured, this article offers researchers and practitioners a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics at work in a context that presents very precise mandates and objectives (Canadian School Sport Federation, 2004). Nonetheless, it is also essential to discuss a few limitations. First, there was an overrepresentation of boys in our sample, which might have an influence on the nature of the responses provided by participants. An interesting future study would consist of examining if differences exist between girls and boys in how they perceive the context of high school sport. Second, the majority of coaches through which participants were recruited were male and having a male coach as a referent may have influenced the results. Future research in this line of inquiry is needed to examine if athletes look for different characteristics in male or female coaches. Third, our sample consisted of Canadian participants who might not necessarily share the same views as high school athletes in the United States or in other countries because of differences in how the sporting environment is structured. For example, some researchers have argued how more of a 'sport as business' mentality exists in the United States as high school athletes are often pushed extensively by parents and coaches to secure university athletic scholarships (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004). Therefore, more research is needed to examine the similarities and differences between high school sport structures in different countries and how they influence athletes' preferences and aspirations.

Conclusion

Given the popularity of high school sport in Canada (Canadian School Sport Federation, 2008) and in many other countries around the world, coaches in this context have the potential to influence the development of a large number of youth. In order to maximise this potential, coaches must, as Jones (2006) stated, reconceptualise their role and view themselves as educators of youth. By promoting participation and athlete development, high school coaches are in preferred position to support athletes in their sport experiences and to facilitate their holistic development. As Collins, Gould, Lauer, and Chung (2009) stated, it is by having high school coaches who treat performance and athlete development

as inclusive pursuits of coaching that sport can meet the needs and expectations of athletes and be used as a tool for development.

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