8-2013

DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION OF COACHING PHILOSOPHIES AMONG COMPETITIVE YOUTH SPORT COACHES

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DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION OF COACHING PHILOSOPHIES AMONG
COMPETITIVE YOUTH SPORT COACHES

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management

by
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August 2013

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

Coaching in the field of youth sports consists of many different approaches and philosophies. While some, when executed correctly, work well at keeping youth engaged and competing at a high level, there are other philosophies that are not implemented correctly at that high performance level. Past experiences have made coaches examine their philosophies in a different way or even change their perspective altogether. Although there are many different coaching styles and beliefs, little is known about how the philosophies of youth coaches are executed. This research is intended to define the core elements in a coaching philosophy, and determine how coaches develop their philosophy based on what has influenced them throughout their coaching career. In addition, this research intends to examine how coaches carry out those philosophies in a competitive setting. Through this, coaches will be able to more easily to determine what changes (if any) need to be made between what their coaching beliefs are and how to effectively put those beliefs into practice and competition. The results of the research showed that, while many coaches have different styles in coaching, they all had a framework that included similar core elements. The four main themes of Coach Development, Player Development, Managed Competition, and Positive Motivational Climate with the element of fun included in each was what was found to be prevalent in each coaching philosophy. While there are numerous philosophies that coaches use in attempt to effectively coach youth sports, a better understanding of the core elements of coaching philosophies and how to execute these philosophies in a competitive setting will help in ensuring progress in developing effective coaches.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

Youth sports are the cornerstone of many adolescents' lives. If implemented

properly, sports participation is a way to promote positive growth and development for

youth beginning in adolescence and going well into their adult lives (Danish, Forneris,

Hodge, & Heke, 2004). According to studies, youth sport presents a way for many

adolescents to experience a structured environment that fosters growth both physically

and socially (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). Part of this growth falls under the responsibility

of the coaches that see these players every day. They not only help them with achieving

athletically related goals, but also help in shaping them into responsible upstanding

citizens with the presence of sports in their lives (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007).

One way that a coach can positively affect a young athlete's life is by presenting

themselves in a way that is consistent with their core philosophy.

Problem: Developing an Effective Coaching Philosophy

If one were to ask coaches in the field of youth sports what they like to focus their

coaching around, they are likely to use a combination of development, having fun, and

winning to describe it (Martens, 2004). Many great coaches have become successful

because their beliefs, values, and their approach to their athletes are different from other

coaches (Collins et al. 2011). However, there is very little research done on the next

generation of perspective coaches and their coaching philosophies (Gilbert & Trudel,

2004). The development of an effective coaching philosophy has gone widely unknown

and subsequently unused. As a result, the need for more research on the use of coaching philosophies by coaches is becoming necessary.

What a coaching philosophy is, how it is developed, and its link with performance and outcomes are all questions that have yet to be answered (Collins et al., 2011). Without a clear understanding of the core elements involved in a coaching philosophy, it is difficult to develop a philosophy to coach and teach by. Martens (2004) indicates that a sound philosophy is key to successful coaching and to the provision of positive youth experiences. Without a sound philosophy, Collins et al., (2011) state that coaches regularly experience inconsistencies between their beliefs and actions. Such inconsistencies include dealing with inappropriate behavior, communication, playing time, and an overemphasis on winning. Much coaching literature fails to explain in-depth what a coaching philosophy is and, as a result, there is limited knowledge into what elements should be included in a coaching philosophy (Collins et al., 2011).

With a development of a sound philosophy and effective approach on how to coach, the development of young athletes can be more effective (Martens, 2004). This is something that seemingly comes later in a coach's career. Wilcox & Trudel (1998) state that few coaches develop a philosophy early in their career. Instead, they rely on on-field experiences and perhaps the development of their philosophies will happen over time (Wilcox & Trudel, 1998). While this may be effective, it seems imperative by the literature that coaches who intend on being influential in the development of a young athlete's life should develop a philosophy improving a young athlete on and off the field (Collins et al. 2011, Martens, 2004).

Along with the task of developing and effectively executing a philosophy, coaches may also face barriers that come with the execution of their own philosophy. Collins et al. (2011) suggests that more should be done to implement actions which follow through on the philosophy that the coaches develop. The authors went on to state that while coaches may have a grasp on the philosophy that they wish to apply to their players, there is still difficulty in effectively executing their philosophy. Such barriers reveal a disconnect between the overall message being said and the message demonstrated by the coach.

Overall the idea of implementing a coaching philosophy is lauded by many in the fields of coaching and sport psychology. However, there still remains much to be desired about the core elements of a coaching philosophy, how it should be executed, the development and influence, and the barriers coaches face in effectively exemplifying their philosophy. A better understanding of these areas is needed to define what is being done well and what needs improvement in effectively enacting coaching philosophies.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine more deeply the core elements of coaching philosophies of youth coaches and how they act them out in a competitive setting, along with what has influenced them to adapt the current philosophies they coach by. Analysis of how coaches carry out their philosophies in practices and matches was also examined. This line of research will allow coaches to have a better understanding of the importance in developing a coaching philosophy.

In addition, the overall meaning of a coaching philosophy was studied. As previously stated, coaching philosophies are somewhat vague. Some suggest coaching knowledge is gained not from a philosophy, but from experience in the field of coaching. (Collins et al. 2011). As a result, many coaches have gone without a philosophy of coaching. However, it is stated numerous times in the literature that a coaching philosophy is needed in order to coach successfully (Martens, 2004, Collins et al. 2011, Wilcox & Trudel, 1998). Therefore, it is imperative to define what a coaching philosophy is and define what the core elements of a coaching philosophy are. From there, philosophies can be more easily examined along a framework that can be related to by many different coaches.

The development of coaching philosophies, along with the influence behind their development were examined. Each coach is influenced by different factors that help in the development of their philosophy. While a coaching philosophy may not be explicitly outlined or identified, there may be common elements that many coaching philosophies contain. Further, issues such as coach behavior, knowledge, role framing, and mentoring, are influenced by a coach's philosophical beliefs (Collins et al. 2011).

Lastly, how coaches execute their philosophies along with the barriers they face in carrying them out were also examined. Collins et al. (2011) state that while some coaches may have a philosophy, there still are questions surrounding whether what the coach's philosophy outlines is similar to what the coach's actions on the field show. A look into what coaches are doing to effectively execute their philosophies in a competitive setting will be examined.

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Research Questions

1) What are the core elements in a coaching philosophy among elite level youth soccer coaches?

2) How are coaching philosophies developed and what has influenced their development?

3) How do elite-level youth soccer coaches put their philosophies into action?

Key Terms

Philosophy- the critical study of the basic principles and concepts of a particular branch of knowledge, especially with a view to improving or reconstituting them.

Youth Sports Organization- A public or nonpublic entity that organizes an athletic activity in which the athletes are not more than nineteen years of age and are required to pay a fee to participate in the athletic activity or whose cost to participate is sponsored by a business or nonprofit organization.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to look at the core elements of coaching philosophies among elite-level youth sport coaches and see how they are developed. From there, the execution of each coaching philosophy in practices was examined in order to see how coaches implemented their teachings in practice. The results will give coaches a framework of core elements to include in their coaching philosophies in order to better coach their players.

What is a Coaching Philosophy?

There is no simple definition of a coaching philosophy in the literature. However, sport coaches have been compared to leaders and managers (Cote, 2006), and as such, it makes sense to compare coaching philosophies to management philosophies. The Business Dictionary (2013) defines a management philosophy as core set of beliefs and principles that guide a manager's actions and decisions. Coaches can follow this definition in a similar way by applying their core set of beliefs and principles to the athletes and teams they coach.

Cote (2006) said that coaches are known to fulfill many different roles including leader, psychologist, friend, teacher, personal manager, administrator, fundraiser, and role model. Therefore, coaching philosophies take on more of a role than just teaching athletes fundamentals, strategies, and execution of plays in sports. The philosophy by which they teach their athletes is also designed to promote personal growth and influence positive development in the athletes they coach (Cote, 2006).

Overall, a coaching philosophy is far from simply a plan of how to execute plays on the field or court. It should also encompass a set of beliefs and principles related to the coaches' role in the development of their players beyond what is done on the field. According to research, an effective coaching philosophy will not only produce victories on the field, but will also teach life skills along the way that will help players in ways that will benefit them in the real world (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007; McCallister, Blinde, Weiss, 2000).

Importance and Impact of a Coaching Philosophy

What the coaches are telling their athletes along with the way that they implement them could reveal the overall importance of the coaching philosophy in a young athlete's life. Although coaching philosophies have been deemed important, there is little known about the core elements that should be included in a coaching philosophy. According to Terry and Howe (1984), there has been thorough review of sports leadership, but little is understood about the overall coaching process. Justification for this has been because of two main reasons. First of all, there has been a lack of sport specific measurement devices for determining leadership behavior. Also, the strategy used to explain coaching behaviors stems from leadership theories that come from other fields (Terry and Howe, 1984). As a result of this, there has been a lack of a solid theoretical base as to which coaching philosophy works the best (Terry & Howe, 1984).

Youth sport coaches have a dramatic impact on the development and enjoyment of sports had by adolescents (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). Although there is so much that comes out of participating in sports, if done incorrectly, coaches can contribute to the

continual decline in the adolescent participation in youth sports. However, when correctly promoted with skillful design that engages the athletes, there could very well be an increase in youth development through sport (Danish, 2002).

With many people getting into the coaching field with many different levels of experience, it has been said that it is very difficult to pick up coaching immediately. When asked, coaches stated that coaching was much more difficult than they anticipated (Strean, 1995). Coaches who had not participated in the sport were rarely given instruction on how to coach the sport which obviously makes the job much more difficult (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998; Sage, 1989). They revealed that their main objectives were to enhance athlete's physical, psychological, and social development as well as have fun (Seefeldt, Ewing, & Walk, 1992).

Research has provided a strong correlation between adult behavior in a coaching situation and psychological growth in children (Harris, 1984). Moreover, coaches have been known to be an influence in more ways than one. To date, coaches have been shown to influence children's attitudes (Harris, 1983), stress and enjoyment (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984; 1986; 1988), participation objectives (Coakley, 1986), and self-esteem (Smith & Smoll, 1990; Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979).

Overall, based on research performed in many different sports, coaches indeed have an impact that affects that outcome of youth athletes participating in youth sports. Whether it is from a development perspective, a psychological perspective, or from just the perspective of having fun, coaches do have an impact that greatly affects how much

the youth athletes improve in the sport they are playing or just simply stay engaged in that sport.

Development of a Coaching Philosophy

According to Mergelsberg (2007), the development of a coaching philosophy comes from a person's everyday life, thinking, and actions and is applied to coaching. While there are many variables that may differ from one coaching philosophy to another, there are core elements that are kept constant when referring to coaching philosophies. Mergelsberg (2007) states that traits such as keeping players as a number one priority, character development, setting realistic goals, and having a passion for the game are all things that, regardless of personal beliefs, should be prevalent in a coaching philosophy.

A distinction should be made between coaching philosophies which are broad statements of beliefs and guiding principles, and specific coaching traits and qualities (Fox, 2006). Overall there seems to be an agreement from many researchers and coaches that there is a set of beliefs and practices that are constant with all coaches in order to be successful, and a set of coaching traits and qualities that distinguish coaches from one another. Similar to Mergelsberg,For example, Fox (2006), states that a coaches' emotional investment in a team's performance and hunger for excellence are often the most important elements in the coaching philosophies of elite, NCAA-level college coaches. However, Fox also explains that two coaches whop share this philosophy may have very different coaching styles, and yet can both produce very successful teams. One coach is a no nonsense disciplinarian who is soft spoken. Another is people oriented, friendly, and very engaging. While these coaches share the same core philosophical

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orientations, they have different personalities and coaching styles. They both were also both NCAA Division I national champions in tennis and year after year were in contention to win the title again (Fox, 2006).

Coaching Efficacy

Coaching efficacy is an important factor in determining a coach's self-perceived ability to carry out their coaching tasks. According to Feltz et al., (1999), coaching efficacy is the extent to which coaches believe they have the capacity to affect the learning and performance of their athletes. While coaching efficacy deals with the overall learning of skills and technique by the athlete, coaching efficacy also looks at the dimension of how the player competes at a high level (Feltz et al., 1999). High coaching efficacy leads to many factors that are favorable to players that compete at a high level. According to Feltz et al. (1999), coaches with high efficacy exhibit coaching styles that are more preferred by elite level players. In addition to player satisfaction, high efficacy coaches also produced more wins on average than did coaches with a low coaching efficacy. Although high efficacy coaches did believe they had an overall impact on the learning and performance of their athletes, the instructional and organizational behavior of those coaches tended to be lower. Coaches with a lower coaching efficacy had more of an outline to their lesson plan and spent more time going over drills and practices than coaches with a higher coaching efficacy. According to research, this is because coaches with lowering sense of coaching efficacy were less efficient than high efficacy coaches and therefore had to spend more time with the process of organizing practices for players (Feltz et al. 1999). Overall, high efficacy coaches have a more positive impact on

coaching their players as well as having a better relationship with their player than do coaches with a lowering coaching efficacy.

Overall, studies show that coaches that believe they have an impact on the improvement of athletes have a better rapport with their players, managed practices more efficiently and had an overall player satisfaction that was higher than those coaches who had a lower coaching efficacy. Studies have shown that a high coaching efficacy among coaches will overall promote a positive impact among the players that the coach has been an influence to.

Core Elements of Coaching Philosophies

Fun

As stated previously, one of the main focuses in coaching youth sports is implementing the element of fun into coaching (Martens, 2004). Children often say fun is the primary reason they play youth sports (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1990; Wankel & Sefton, 1989). Accordingly, many coaches base their practices and teachings in a way that incorporates fun into them. Without fun, many youth drop out of the sport because of lack of enjoyment. Duda (1987) and Roberts (1984) explain that when the focus is placed on the achievement of fun for the athletes, the development of athletes is more easily obtained. Fun is implemented in youth sports in order to enhance development while taking the emphasis off of winning. According to Mitchell, Griffin, & Oslin, (1994) and Turner & Martinek (1995), when fun is promoted in youth sports, along with mastering fundamentals skills and tactical awareness, their chances of a positive experience in physical activities increases.

When implementing the enhancement of fun into a practice, there are some elements that are important to follow: (a) a democratic environment (Baumgarten, 1984; Stover, 1988); (b) emphasis on personal development and personal involvement (Baumgarten, 1984; Coakley, 1994); (c) maximizing children's involvement in the action, feelings of control over the game and ensuring there is a purpose and satisfaction for doing the activity for its own sake (Baumgarten, 1984; Coakley, 1994; Harris, 1984); (d) fostering fair teams, team rotation, or handicapping one team if they are winning convincingly (Coakley, 1994); (e) modification of rules to increase both action and scoring opportunities (Coakley, 1994; Wessinger, 1994); and (f) educating players and parents about the purposes of the sport program (Stover, 1988). Each of these techniques has been implemented in youth sport settings.

Winning

Winning is another aspect associated with coaching youth sports (Martens, 2004). While winning is indeed something that is strived for by both coaches and players, the results that come from it are often mixed. While winning does not necessarily bring enjoyment to a player or team, it is a strong indicator of a coach's teaching ability and knowledge of the game for certain players (Cumming et. al, 2007). In a study by Smith et al. (1978), participants who were mastery-involved stated that a coach's ability and knowledge of the sport they coached was not dependent on the win-loss record of the team. However, players who were more ego-involved tended to rate their coach based on the win-loss record of their team. With that being said, a the degree to which a player liked their coach had little to do with a teams win-loss percentage and had more to do

with the motivational climate that the coach developed. Youth who were ego-involved and on teams that were more successful than other teams felt that their coach was more knowledgeable of the game and was better at teaching the sport than other coaches while mastery-involved athletes evaluated the coach regardless of the record of their team, and more on his or her overall knowledge of the game.

While winning and losing do affect an athlete's perception of a coach that is not the only criteria that is used to measure the coach's potential. The overall enjoyment of an athlete with their sport is more dependent on the coaching behaviors of the coach than the win-loss record of the team (Cumming et. al, 2007). According to Smith et. al (1978), winning is not a prerequisite to how much an athlete enjoys or likes the coach. Although the findings of Smith et. al is over three decades old, it is indicative that the athlete's perspective of the coach is not solely dependent on winning. Overall while winning is indeed something that many athletes may strive for, research has shown that the win-loss record of a team does not necessarily affect the overall attitude of an athlete towards a coach, but rather it is a mix of the overall coaching ability and behavior of the coach and the motivational climate of the player that mostly affected the way that the players perceived their coach.

Youth Development

Sport has been called the "training ground for life." In the 20th century, qualities such as good sportsmanship were meant to help an adolescent mature in a positive way through sports thus helping them through the rest of their life (Danish, 2002). However, the 21st century has brought about more of a business sense and motivation of making a

profit than positively developing adolescents. Because of this, there has been a lack of properly structured sports programs that positively influence the growth and development of young athletes (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, and Heke, 2004)

Research suggests that there is considerable evidence pertaining to positive psychological growth in regular participation in youth sports (ISSE 1992; US Surgeon General Report, 1996). While this may seem like positive news as far as youth development goes, this positive development does not necessarily come just from time spent on the court or field (Hodge and Danish, 1999). Research has shown both positive and negative effects in the mere participation of these youth sports. For example, it is not the participation in the sport itself as much as the individual experience that accounts for the positive or negative effects on the sport to the participant (Strean & Garcia Bengoechea, 2001). Therefore, the structure and context involved in the sport plays more of an important role in the positive development of an adolescent than simply sole participation in the sport. This structure that youth sports are shaped by plays a critical role in whether or not the participant benefits from playing sports.

It is reasonable to suggest that sports programs should be youth centered- that is, they should be comprised of the reasons why youth actually participate. While there are many motives for why youths participate in sports, there are a few that come up more often than others. These motives include improving skills, having fun, and being with friends and making new ones (Athletic Footwear Association, 1990; Weiss and Petlichkoff, 1989). With a sports program structured through individual motives of the participants rather than as a plan solely to make money, youths are more likely to reach

personal goals as well as experience satisfaction in doing so (Danish, Petitpas & Hale.,

1993; Danish, Nellen & Owens, 1996; Hodge, 1994a, b). This does two beneficial things.

First, it gives young athletes tangible goals to strive for as well as ones that are easily

measured. Second, it also gives youth an opportunity to both set goals and experience

satisfaction in achieving these goals. These are two things that will ultimately help with

positive development in adolescents (Bandura, 1995).

Motivational Climate

While winning will always be prevalent in sports, it is not the only objective

element that should be involved in competition (Martens, 2004; Smith & Smoll, 2002;

Thompson, 2003). Rather, the development of athletes should be the primary goal of

coaches. Winning comes in as the overall consequence of the athlete's physical and

psychological engagement in the sport that he or she is participating in (Cumming et. al,

2007). With that being said, motivational climate and how coaches set up their coaching

environment is something has also been examined as a way to provide another vantage

point to competition other than winning (Cumming et. al, 2007).

Motivational climate refers to the atmosphere that a coach creates for his or her

team. Similar to Achievement Goal Theory (Nichols, 1984; Nichols, 1988), coaches

create motivational climates that are either ego-involved or task-involved – that is, they

define success as either intrinsically or extrinsically focused. Achievement Goal Theory

incorporates both personal and environmental aspects of goal-directed achievement

behavior. According to Nicholls (1984, 1989) individuals are ego involved, when their

definition of personal success is defined through others. In other words, the goal for

someone who is ego involved is to show their superiority to others by proving they are less inferior through competition. Ego involved individuals feel successful when they out-perform others without an accomplished effort in doing so. Ego involved individuals also have more of a "winning at all cost" mentality which makes them more inclined to use different strategies, whether appropriate or inappropriate, to get a winning result (McArdle & Duda, 2002).

Task oriented athletes are on the other side of the spectrum. When an athlete is task involved, their ideas of success and competence come from a self-referenced manner. Task involved people feel competent when they learn something new, witness self-improvement in skills or performance, master a task, or give the upmost effort. Even if task involved individuals possess a lower ability than others, the idea of success of a task or competition does not come from winning, but from improving on the criteria involved in the task that they are attempting. Of the two points of view that have been expressed, task involvement fosters adaptive achievement behaviors such as persistence in the face of failure, exerting effort and selecting challenging goals regardless of the ability that the individual may possess (Chi, 2004; Duda & Hall, 2001; Roberts, Treasure, & Kavussanu, 1997).

Conclusion

This literature review has attempted to outline what the coaching research has to say about the importance of coaching philosophies, and some of the core elements that ought to be emphasized when developing them. In addition to the core elements of fun, winning, youth development, and motivation, the research literature emphasizes that

coaches need to adapt their approaches to fit the needs of their athletes (Baribeau 2006, Dunn 2009, Gilbert Gilbert and Trudel, 2001). There still, however, remains many questions about how actual youth sport coaches articulate their philosophies of coaching, and how these philosophies are actually implemented on the field. These are questions that this study seeks to answer.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

In an effort to examine a youth sport coaching philosophy this research used in depth interviewing with coaches and observations of their behavior to examine this complex and often not explicitly stated topic. Since philosophy development may be done in an intuitive way by effective coaches, attention was paid to the descriptions of goals of coaching and how coaches perceive effectiveness including, looking for the coaches' view of indicators of effectiveness and success. Therefore this study used a qualitative methodology seeking discovery and in-depth understanding of a complex phenomenon, and provided an observational component of the coaching behaviors of elite level youth soccer coaches. Each coach was interviewed with a set of semi-structured questions. From there, two observations of the coaches at practice or in a competitive setting were conducted. Based on the answers provided by the coaches in their interviews, the researcher was able to see first-hand how coaches implemented their philosophies, and whether or not their actions were consistent with their stated principles and beliefs.

Description of Participants

In order to effectively examine the different philosophies that have been developed by various coaches, semi-structured interviews were used. From there, the coaches' philosophies were more closely examined in order to see how they were being effectively put into practice. The coaches that were interviewed were five elite youth soccer coaches at one of the top academies in Upstate South Carolina (see Table 1). Each

coach had demonstrated that he was capable of coaching youth sports through experience that showed success and knowledge at a competitive level of coaching. The research steps began with contacting the CEO of the Academy. Contact information for the coaches in the Premiere League was given along with permission to interview them and observe their practices. Emails were sent to each of the twelve coaches in the Premiere League explaining the research and asking if they would like to volunteer in the research. Of the twelve that were contacted, five of them responded saying that they would like to be part of the research. Of the five coaches who agreed to participate, all but one were available to be observed during 2 of their practices. Due to time constraints, the fifth coach was observed during one of his matches. The five coaches were interviewed in sessions lasting 30-40 minutes. From there, data was collected on the different philosophies that these coaches used in order to coach their players.

Table 1: Study Participants

Name of Coach	Years Coaching	Age Division	Gender of Athletes
John	23	U9	Boys
Matt	25	U14	Girls
Roger	16	U11	Girls
Chuck	15	U14	Boys
Sid	20	High School	Boys

Data Collection

The data collection was done in the Spring of 2013. Semi-structured interviews were used that contained questions about the coaches' own personal experiences and how they used those unique experiences to teach their players and form the philosophy by

which they currently coach their team. From there, more in-depth questions were asked such as what influenced the development of the philosophy, strategies for implementing their philosophy, and what is included in their core elements of coaching.

Interviews and Observation

Semi structured interviews were administered for each coach. Open ended questions were asked pertaining to the research questions that were selected for the interview process. The interviews were shaped to answer each research question in a way that allows the researcher to grasp the ideas, influences, and beliefs behind the coaching philosophy the participants used on each player to both influence positive development along with successful performance on the field.

Although the main portion of the research was done through interviews, a structured observational portion to the research was also used. Through the observational phase of the research, each coach was observed during two practices or one match. The information gathered in the observation was then compared to the information gathered in the interview to see the similarities or differences in what the coaches were saying and what they were doing.

Coding

Following that, every line of data from the interviews was coded. An initial list of codes was collapsed to approximately 80 unique codes. These codes were then further collapsed into 20 categories. Finally, these categories were collapsed into four broad themes. Representative quotes or specific observational data were then selected to represent each theme, as well as each category or subtheme. Faculty experts in youth

sports, youth development, and qualitative research were consulted throughout the process ensure reliability and accuracy with the coding and categorization process.

The coding process began with the audio recording and transcribing of each interview verbatim. Member checking of the interviews was then done in order to allow the coaches to add or clarify any of the information for each interview. Following that, every line of data from the interviews was coded. Common codes were then examined and then made into larger codes and subthemes based on the categories. Representative quotes were then selected from the data to represent each theme. Faculty experts in youth sports, youth development, and qualitative research were consulted throughout the process to ensure reliability and accuracy with the codes and themes.

Questions Used in the Interview

Listed below are the interview questions used for each interview. The interview style that was used was semi structured and open ended questions that encouraged follow up questions for each question asked if needed. The interviews lasted approximately 30-40 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The answers that were derived in the interviews were then used in the observation portion of the research.

1. Tell me a little bit about your coaching background.

    a. Playing experience, coaching experience etc.

2. How would you describe yourself as a coach?

    a. Warm up question…

3. What has influenced your approach to coaching?

    a. People(other coaches), past experiences, success/failure

4. Which coaches do you base your coaching philosophy on? Why that/those coach(es)?

5. What does "developing athletes" mean to you?

6. What are some of the specific things you do as a coach to develop your athletes?

7. How important is winning to you as a coach?

8. How do you address winning with your athletes?

9. How important is it that your athletes have fun?

10. What are some of the things you do in practices and games to keep things fun?

11. Describe your motivational style or your approach to motivation.

12. Can you tell me any specific techniques you use to motivate your players?

13. Do you have a coaching philosophy? How important is it for coaches to have a coaching philosophy?

14. What are the core elements of your coaching philosophy?

15. Has your coaching philosophy or approach to coaching changed over the years? How? What caused this change?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add about your approach to coaching, your coaching style, or the specific techniques or practices that you use in your coaching?

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

With many different approaches to coaching, there is not one that is more effective than the rest. With that being said, there is still much lacking in regards to what should effectively be included in a proper coaching philosophy. Figure 1 represents a coaching framework for demonstrating the core elements of the philosophy of coaching. Regardless of coaching styles, personality, or preferences, each coach can use this framework to develop their coaching styles around core elements that take into perspective what different coaches at a highly competitive youth level have used to coach their players. This framework has been developed through interviews and observations with high level youth soccer coaches at one of the most successful academies in South Carolina. The research sought to interview five coaches about their coaching styles and philosophies and was followed with observations of each of them during practices or matches to see if what they were doing in their practices effectively mirrored what was said in their interviews. With data collected about each coach, a coaching framework model was created to illustrate what these coaches exemplified in their interviews, practices, and matches.

Figure 1

Elite Level Youth Sport Coaching Model

Every coach has a different way that he or she approaches coaching their players. Some are self-proclaimed "hollerers and screamers" while others take a more passive and subtle approach to their players. There are coaches who appreciate the purity of the game and coach the game through the tactical aspect. In contrast, there are coaches who have a desire to teach their players the fundamentals and the basics of the game. With all of these different philosophies or beliefs on how the game should be played, each style of coaching, if done correctly, can produce favorable results. However, even with each coaching style different than the last, there is a need for a foundation that each coach, regardless of their coaching style, can follow in order to produce winning results in

competitive elite level youth leagues. The interviews conducted coupled with the observations of each coach has resulted in four distinct themes with the element of fun interwoven through each. Through the interviews and observations, the four themes that emerged were Athlete Development, Positive Motivational Climate, Managed Competition, and Coaching Development. Each of these categories include subcategories that help better explain the meaning behind each category while still having fun as the core model for which each theme revolves around. Fun is a means to an end where the goal of the coach is not fun, but to effectively and successfully convey the four themes to their players *through* fun.

While the thoughts from each coach were as different from one another as their unique coaching styles, one answer that remained the same was that fun was the most important element of the game. Without it, players will quit and coaches will not enjoy the game anymore. It is often an overlooked or even forgotten trait that is lost when competition and the expectations on the players as well as coaches increases. John put it very simply when he stated that "If it's not enjoyable for me, then I'm gonna give up coaching." Fun is something that can very easily get lost when competition becomes more of an important factor, but at the same time, it is something that every player and coach can relate to. Many (if not all) players begin playing their respective sport because initially it was fun. Chapter four will explore each of the four themes giving examples from both the interviews and observations that best illustrate the themes as well as how they tie back to the overarching theme of fun. Even with each of these coaches displaying

different coaching attributes, fun was always the aspect that each coach found to be the most vital.

Managed Competition

Managed competition refers to what each coach does in order to prepare his players for competition. The drills performed, teams the players compete against, as well as the overall structure of the practice are all components of managing the competitive aspect of the game for the players. Upon interviewing the coaches, four subthemes emerged as areas that should be present in order for these coaches to effectively manage competition. Constantly challenging the players, providing stimulating competition, setting high expectations during the season, and preparing the players for success were the elements that were found that effectively explained what should be included when managing competition.

The distinct area that separates this Academy from others is the successful results they have accumulated over the years. This comes from the managed competition that occurs both against other teams as well as within each team and player. Chuck mentioned that each boys' team from U13 up to U18 is currently ranked either first or second in the state including one ranked top 30 and one ranked top 10 nationally. Because of figures like this, there is a high expectation from each team to compete for a title every year. That being said, there is a certain way that competition is managed by each coach. It is a way of challenging each player as well as setting high expectations to succeed.

The Academy is set up in a way that includes 3 different levels of serious competition as well as a recreation league. From the early ages of 7 and 8, the athletes

that are more technically and athletically advanced and want to make the transition from recreational to competitive soccer tryout for the Center of Excellence. This is designed to create an engaging, competitive and, most importantly, enjoyable experience for each player. From there, they advance to the Junior Academy from the U9 to the U12 ages groups. Here they train in an environment that tests them and focuses mainly on their technical ability while having them develop a love for the game. As they age up to U12, they go on to the travel teams. The travel team program divides the players into one of three groups depending on each player's talent. The top boys players are put into a group called the "Premiere League", the next tier of players is placed in the "Select League" and the third group is placed in the "Challenge League". The girl's leagues are sorted a little differently. The top girls compete in a league titled the Elite Clubs National League (ECNL) that was created specifically for female soccer players. The next group of girls competes in the "Premiere League" and the third class plays in the "Select League". Placement is done at an open tryout at the beginning of each season. The interviews and on-field observations consisted only of coaches whose players were competing in the "Premiere League" for boys and ECNL for U14 girls and "Premiere League" for U12 girls. Because the ECNL begins at the age of 14, the "Premiere League" is the highest level for U12 girls. This managed competition has proven to be very successful as they have won over 4 times as many state titles as all other soccer academies in South Carolina combined.

Another valuable facet to this Academy is its reputation of placing many of its players on college teams all over the country. Each year, dozens of high school seniors

sign National Letters of Intent to play college soccer. The Academy is the most represented academy in the state as well as one of the most exemplified for college recruitment in the entire nation. They currently have players competing all over the country in places as close as Clemson University to universities as far away as Southern California. Their ability to get these players so well noticed is in part due to the showcases and combines that they travel to and host. For example, the week before Matt's interview, he was in Dallas, Texas with a group of his U15, U16, U17 and U18 girls at a college showcase tournament to play in front of nearly 200 college coaches representing schools in every major Division I conference as well as each division from all over the country. These coaches have managed to be so successful because of a combination of challenging players, competition, high expectations, and the successful results that transpire from effectively incorporating each aspect into their practices and teachings. This is the area in the research that demonstrates what puts this academy at the elite level and what the coaches are doing to effectively manage competition and constantly keep their Academy at the top of the ranks year after year.

Challenge

Each player is constantly challenged during both practices and matches with high expectations put on them. After each season, Fall and Spring, every player is evaluated on what they are doing well and what they need to work on. From there, their progress will be examined and the coaches will determine if they should be promoted to the next league up, relegated to the league below them, or stay at the current league they are in. This challenges the players to look to improve and dedicate themselves to getting better

at every practice because of the high expectations put on them if their play starts to falter. Small challenges are done in practices in order for the coaches to see who is putting in the work off the field to get better. Matt uses a juggling drill at the beginning of each of his practices to motivate his players to get better with their balance and coordination. However, it is also done to see who is putting in the work outside of practice. If Matt notices that someone is not practicing juggling on their own because of their failure to improve their juggling as the season progresses, he may think that they are not as dedicated as the other players. As a result, the player may be relegated to the group below the one they are in and replaced with someone who is putting forth more effort to get better. Drills such as this have more than one use and give the coaches a chance to see which players are demonstrating autonomy and the will to get better on their own. Those are the players that the coaches want on their top teams.

John does something similar. The week after he gave out his player evaluations, he kept an eye on what his players were doing on their own before practice began. He made a mental note on who was working on parts of their game that needed work and who were just aimlessly kicking the ball around or working their skills that did not help in their progress. For example, he pointed out two athletes that were working on set pieces. One was kicking corner kicks to his teammate who was heading the ball into the goal. He explained that he told the one taking the corner kicks that he needed to work on crosses towards the goal and the other that he needed to work on using his head more. Without being told what to do, the players were working on their skills needed improvement. That is one of the challenging aspects that John looks for when it is time

for a player to move up an age group and a decision needs to be made about which league he should be put into. At the end of the season, John explained that small instances like that were taken into consideration when deciding who stays in the top group and who gets relegated.

During one of Chuck's practices he noticed some negativity coming from one of his players. Throughout one of the drills, the player's attitude continued to worsen because of his subpar performance and he was giving his teammates negative criticism when they made a mistake. He took the player aside and chided him for his poor attitude and negativity. Chuck told the player "I don't want to see you with your head down ever again. If you make a mistake, say 'my bad' and look to correct it. I better not see it keep affecting your performance." After his talk with the player, Chuck sat him out for a few minutes while he gave another player an opportunity to play. In this instance, the coach is challenging two players. First of all, he is challenging the faulted player to shape up his attitude by benching him and seeing how he reacts to it, and he is challenging the player coming in by giving him an opportunity to play with the top competition. There is always someone looking to get into that top group and a constant poor attitude at practices will give aspiring starters a chance to do just that.

Another example of challenging that Chuck includes in his practice was combining the U13 "Premiere League" team with the U14 "Premiere League" team. These two teams will practice together on occasion for a couple of reasons. First of all, it gives the U13 team an opportunity to play against better competition as well as allow them to have an idea first hand of what it takes to be a part of the U14 "Premiere League"

team. This also challenges the U14 team by putting pressure on them. Chuck explained the expectation that they are supposed to be better than the U13 because they have more experience as well as constant competition against bigger, stronger, and more developed players.

Along with there being high expectations on players, coaches can often be challenged in unexpected ways. For example, the U14 boys "Premiere League" team is the top seeded team participating in an upcoming single elimination tournament. The team they play in the first round is the U14 "Select League" team from the same Academy that recently qualified into the final spot. While there is a lot of expectations on the "Premiere League" players to win the match against the team that is not supposed to be as talented as them, Chuck states that there is also some high expectation on him to win the match. If his team does not come out and win, there may be some questions regarding not only if he is the right coach for that team, but why some players on the "Select League" team were not chosen to play on the "Premiere League" team and vice versa. Chuck states that many of the players on the "Select League" team thought they were good enough to play on the "Premiere League" team so they will be coming into the match with "a chip on their shoulder and something to prove to the coach who passed him up for other players." Matches like this make the selection process during open tryouts a major challenge for coaches because of their reputation for selecting the best talent in the state to compete in other "Premiere League" tournaments and showcases around the country. Not selecting the right players may also have a detrimental impact on their own player development as well as their motivation to continue to play with as

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much dedication as they would if they were on the "Premiere League" team. Coaches at this Academy have high expectations placed on them and are challenged as much as the players they coach.

Competition

Competition is something that is constantly occurring in practice regardless of the age or level. Each player competes when they are in a match so it is vital that much of the team's practices revolve around competition. Each coach has an array of drills that involved competing with one team up a player, certain players with limitations, players that play on both sides of the ball, players that played outside of the grid (smaller field with cones used as boundaries), or simply just teams competing against each other.

 John's practices consist of a lot of the players split into two teams with a punishment on the line for the losing team (sprints or picking up balls while the winning team got a longer water break). One drill is a simple 1v1 game where 2 players would fight for possession of the ball and try to get it past the lone defender and goalkeeper. Throughout this drill, the players in line to play next would yell words of encouragement to their teammate as well as let him know if something was happening that he was not aware of, such as where the defender may have been coming in from. This drill focuses not only on intense competition, but also encourages communication from the players not in. Communication is a very important component for a lot of the older teams and John tries to instill that in his younger players as early as possible. Once a player scores, both go to the back of the line and one new player from each team was in next. Throughout this drill, there was not much coaching from John, but he did make it clear when he saw

something he liked (using non dominant foot to shoot, proper defending, correct movement from the goalkeeper) and something he did not like (keeping head down while dribbling, stalling with the ball, bad decision on shot-making). Even at the U9 age, competition was very intense and it was clear that these players wanted to win as badly as the older players.

Competition is also done in a lighter atmosphere. During the end of practices, Matt and Roger both like to do finishing drills with 2 teams pitted against each other. Roger's drill involved 2 players at a time, one from each team, quickly dribbling up to the penalty box, dribbling back and attempting to kick the ball into the goal with the ball touching the net without hitting the ground first, or with the ball hitting the crossbar. The first player to do either of those successfully receives a point for their team. The players had fun with the competition because of the positive body language they exhibited as well as the opportunity they had to interact with their teammates in a lighter atmosphere. Matt's game at the end of his practice consists of two teams competing against each other as well. The point started with one of the players crossing a ball into the penalty area. The four players competing (two from each team) attempted to score off the cross. If a goal was scored or the ball was kicked out of play, two new players form each team entered to play while the other four went to the back of the line. The highlight of the night came during this game when one of the players scored her first-ever header. She screamed in disbelief as she scored the game winning goal in the process.

Chuck's practices, while mainly consisting of intensely running set plays and drills that simulate real matches, also use competition. Many of his drills would begin

with the players running the designed play on a smaller grid and would progress into

running the same drill on a larger field. Eventually, a game that puts two teams

competing against each other would be played with the parameters of the game emulating

the drills previously worked on in the practice. Occasionally, he sets up scrimmages with

other universities and have his players play against their women's teams. This gave his

players an opportunity to play against more top competition around the area. He informed

me that his U14 boys' team beat the University of South Carolina 1-0 and tied Furman

University 1-1. His competition drills and scrimmages, although sometimes played

against other players, consisted of talent around the area in order to see how well they can

adapt to other teams they had not played before.

Competing is at the forefront of every sport and occurs one way or another in just

about every practice. When a player learns to properly compete in practice, they can more

easily translate it into a match scenario, thus get into a good habit of winning. Players

also feed off competition. They want the bragging rights of the night and to be able to say

that they won the drill or scored the game winning point for their team. John said in the

interview that

Competitive could be as simple as say: losing team does 2 sprints. I really don't

want them to do the 2 sprints… They want competition. They want bragging

rights. They wanna say they won. That in itself is the added a little bit of pressure

when its 9-8 and 10 goals wins. That's the added bit of pressure. 'Hey you score

this and you win.' That's the added pressure to know that all of a sudden his

teammates is keeping track of that saying 'Hey you gotta score now and we win.'

Adding that bit of competition to each practice give the players something to look forward to regardless of whether they won the game the last practice and are looking to make it two in a row, to whether they lost a heart-breaker last practice and are looking for redemption. When observing competition facilitated this right way, it was prevalent that it gave the players an incentive to put forth more effort regardless of whether or not they won the practice before. That can fuel their motivation to get better outside of practice.

High Expectations

One of the pitfalls of having a very successful program is the expectations that are constantly put on the coaches and the players to live up to their lofty goals. Parents spend a lucrative amount of money on soccer equipment, travel, and of course, the ideal training conditions. The money spent on their sons and daughters at this level is an investment. They are investing their money into the program in hopes that, in return, the coaches train their son or daughter hard enough to get a college scholarship. If they fail to do so, they risk losing important clientele in both the business and competition sense.

The increase of expectations as well as the ample amount of money put into youth elite academies is relatively new. It is the same for all elite level youth sports and is a growing industry that has rapidly taken off in the past decade. Matt explained how the culture of college and elite level youth sports has changed dramatically over the years. In the interview, he stated

> We went to Dallas last weekend for a recruiting event. We're taking our group of 15 year old girls… 15, 16, 17, 18… four groups to Dallas for the weekend. 10 years ago? Unheard of! Now if the college coaches said 'We're gonna go to

Anchorage, Alaska and that's where we're gonna hold this event.' Guess where we'd be? Anchorage, Alaska. So it is all being driven. All the way from the recruiting side of it, to the fact that now our better 14 and 15 year olds are being recruited by colleges whereas years ago it was 17 year olds. So it has changed.

As an Academy that prides themselves on training a large amount of players that go on to receive college soccer scholarships, they must be willing to make these travel commitments in order to get as much exposure as all the other aspiring college soccer players. If they do not go to these showcases and major tournaments, all of a sudden they are not living up to the high expectations set by the people investing their time and hard earned money into the academy. As a result, they risk losing copious amounts of people because of their failure to keep up with the other academies that are making these trips halfway across the country. It is a game they must play in order to stay relevant and live up to those lofty expectations.

With the expectations being held so high on the academy, it is the coaches' jobs to set high expectations for their players as well. Each coach has their own technique for getting the most out of their players. Roger reminisced about his girls team last year and the high bar he set for them. The previous year, they finished fourth out of the 9 teams in their conference. The next year, the conference added a team from Virginia as well as 2 from Florida which made their conference extremely difficult. Even though they finished fourth the year before and added three new teams, his new goal this year was to finish in the top 3 of the conference. Although they started out the season 1-4, Roger's expectations did not change for his team. He stated "And it comes from, 'Hey, we don't

care that we're 1-4, and that's crap... This is the expectation; this is what the goal was.'"

Although they had a good push at the end of the season by losing only one match in their

final 17 (10 wins, 6 draws, and a loss as well as defeating several teams they lost to

earlier in the season), they finished fourth in their conference for a second straight year.

Roger acknowledged that even though they fell short of their challenging expectations, he

simply wanted his team to improve from the prior season. He explained

> And we didn't reach the goal. But the goal wasn't to finish first in our conference
>
> and lets play for a national championship and this and that, the goal was to do
>
> better than we did last year even though the conference is gonna be tougher, and
>
> the goal was, even though we had such a crap start and were way behind, it
>
> doesn't change anything.

Even with more academies forming and expanding as well as competition in the region

getting tougher, his expectations for his team were kept high because of what is expected

of him and all the other coaches who coach at the number one academy in South

Carolina. If his expectations were to have changed to something less ambitious simply

because of the expansion of their region, his academy begins to take steps away from

being the pinnacle soccer Academy in South Carolina. With each academy in the country

getting bigger, just like theirs, they must continue to set high expectations each season in

order for them to remain one of the premiere teams in the region.

John explained about how winning matches subsequently increased his

expectations of those teams. A few years ago, he coached a U16 team that finished in 2nd

in the nation. Now, for this team, he never expected that team to finish runner-up at

nationals. However, he did have high expectations of them winning the state and regional tournaments. With those ambitious goals, the confidence and belief in his players increased as they advanced. Referring to the teams that were favored against them in the tournament, John said "… [These teams were] better than us, but they never felt like any team was better than them…So the mentality was probably the biggest key at the high level." Setting the bar high for his team helped them possibly achieve more than they would have if their expectations were set lower. Having high expectations at the highest level is one way to get the best out of the teams that one is coaching.

Success

The coaches at the academy do their best to prepare their players for success. Players are given every resource that is available to them to be successful. They train at an enormous and ever-expanding state-of-the-art facility with qualified coaches who are very familiar to winning. They also have the opportunity to travel all across the country and showcase their talents to intrigued college coaches by competing against the best teams in the nation. Things like that are very helpful in attracting the best players from around the state. This academy has seen so much success, players from as far away as Myrtle Beach, SC, Asheville, NC, and Baton Rouge, LA have traveled to the Upstate to train at their facilities and compete with their players and coaches. An academy with a track record of success brings talent from all over with the promise that they can mold the athlete into a successful soccer player.

While success in the rankings does help to bring in new talent every year, success as a coach does not just include winning tournaments and state titles. Matt reiterated that

"How much detail we can go into so developing individual relationships is probably the biggest key to having success and making your players comfortable in coming back to see you when you're finished." This not only means that the coach has successfully developed the player into a college soccer player, but it also means that the former player may come back as a coach or be an ambassador to the sport he or she is passionate about. Either way, this brings more exposure to the team and sport as well as spreads a positive word about the academy. Success does not just come in the form of results, but it also comes in the form of how well of a job the coaches did of building a relationship with their players and having them leave the game with a desire to positively promote the game at the academy they trained at.

Although successful results yield more attention to the Academy, there is a discrepancy between what the perception of success is to the coaches and what it is to the parents and others outside the Academy. In John's interview, he explains the contrasting views of what success means to his coaches at the Academy and what it means to others.

If my record was .500, would people think I'm a good coach? If my record is 10-0, people say you're a great coach but it may not be. I may just have had the best players, the best athletes. And I could give that team to anybody and they're gonna be 10-0. My other team that .500, I give them to anybody, they might be 0-10. I actually did a better coaching job with the .500 team. So there's a lot of that misperception about who was actually a good coach and what's a good coach.

Much of how success is defined by the coaches relates to each individual team and their performances in the season prior to the current one as well as the chemistry the players

have with one another. For example, John took over a team that went 0-10 the previous year. The next year, they managed to win 5 games. Although the perception of many may be that the team did not have a successful season, the fact that they finished the year before with no wins and managed to win five games the next season is perceived as successful for the coaches at this Academy. Roger has a similar take on success While he believes that winning is important, he explains that it is a "double edged sword" in some ways

> I wanna win every single game we… now, how important is it in the big picture of the players? That's depends. Winning is second to, winning is certainly second to developing the individual. Winning is certainly second to making sure the kid loves the game. You could win every game for 6 months, but if it's at the expense of the kid not loving the game anymore, what do you think is going to happen the next 6 months? The kid stops coming to training, the kids doesn't wanna be there, the kid doesn't put his heart into it or her heart into it and that all gonna go away real soon.

Success is not defined by the number of wins a team has, but the progress that the team is making from season to season. The idea of measuring success through individual and team improvements has allowed for the coaches to better examine each team and better coach them through their individual achievements. It has also allowed the coaches give their players and teams goals that are more attainable in order for them to have a season that is perceived successful by their coaches.

Where Does Fun Fit?

With there being many different challenges and situations that both players and coaches face at this Academy, one may argue that the element of fun does not exist in this section. However, while there may not be much Fun in some senses of the word, these players and coaches are having Fun because of the aspect of competition and playing the sport they love at such a high level. These coaches and players each have an unbridled passion for the game that makes them come back every day even after a physically exhausting practice or a practice in unbearable, cold, windy, or rainy weather conditions. John mentioned in his interview about why he coaches. He stated "I got into coaching soccer because it happened to be a job. I happened to have an addictive hobby that I get paid for, which is fantastic. And that's the enjoyment part." Matt had a similar take on coaching. He explained

> When you do something for a living, you do begin to ask yourself 'Why am I doing this? Is it because I get paid?' Eh that's part of it. Gotta support my family. 'Is it because I love it?' Because how many people really love what they do? I don't think there's many. I love it. Absolutely love doing it. And I just don't wanna lose sight of those things.

The passion behind why each of these people coach soccer for a living is not only because they get paid for it, but more importantly, it's because they still enjoy the game and can still find the fun out of it regardless of the bad weather during practices and matches, the expectation on them to succeed, or the time it takes out of their lives with their families when they have to travel for days at a time. Roger explained it by stating

To do this is no different than going into teaching, to going into nursing, to going into… you can't come do this, in my opinion, unless it's what you really want to do regardless of money, regardless of… Hey I don't have a normal schedule. I don't eat dinner at a normal hour. All those things… there are weekends that I spend in a hotel in some city not going out, not this and that, just having a team meeting at 9:00 at night and getting up at 7:00am for a game and having a team lunch and all of a sudden that was my weekend when all my friends were off doing this and that. To do this, it's such a cliché, but you have to love doing it to do it. It's not that you have to [only] love kids. It's not that you have to [only] love coaching; it's not that you have to [only] love the game. You have to love all of that stuff."

One common agreement amongst the coaches is that they don't coach for the money. They do it because they love the game as well as making a positive impression by developing the players they coach into upstanding citizens through soccer. Doing this effectively can not only help them on and off the field, but can help spark an interest in them to give back to the game, just like their coaches did to them, after their playing career is done. Matt explained that

This is a game you can enjoy for the next 50 years, because once you finish playing, we want you to watch it and encourage your kids to play it. So I think going back and asking players why they started playing and trying to understand that I have to make it an enjoyable yet challenging environment for them and it

has to be a comfortable environment. I think that is really kinda the key when ask

me how do you get players to wanna do it. To enjoy it."

Matt had a positive experience as a kid with his dad taking him to soccer matches in his

hometown. His positive experience as a childhood fan continued as player at the college

and professional level. Consequently, he has wanted him to spend an ample amount of his

life giving back to and promoting the game that he became passionate about. Generations

of this have allowed this academy to continue its success as well promote the game they

enjoy.

Athlete Development

The second theme discussed by the coaches is the idea of athlete development.

Athlete development explains the areas that the coaches focused on in order to properly

develop the players from the young age group of the U9s all the way up to right before

college. The coaches focused not only on developing the athletes on the field with proper

technique and knowledge of the game, but also tried to teach life skills through soccer.

While life skills are not necessarily developed solely on the field, off-the-field aspects

such as camaraderie, teamwork, and responding to failure were areas addressed by the

coach in an attempt to help them prepare for obstacles they may face later in life. The

development of a proper coach/athlete relationship was also addressed. The coaches often

saw themselves as teachers or mentors who could get the best out of their players if the

proper relationship was developed. According to the coaches, athlete development has

more of an impact than just what is seen on the field.

Within athletic development, the three sub-themes of sport specific development, life skills development, and coach/athlete relationship were embedded. Regardless of the age group, each coach was focused on developing their athletes in a way that best prepared them for the next age group or even college. Matt explained that the development of his athletes meant that "You tailor your practices to push them beyond what they think they're capable of." His high expectations for his players not only helped them win matches, but it was also his own way of preparing his players for the next level of older, bigger competition. For Roger, it was more of a mental thing. He stated that "In every sport and in every level, people that end up succeeding have the right mentality." In accordance to that, he mentioned in the interview as well as demonstrated in practice that his players are always competing and always keeping score to in order to develop that proper mentality of competing. Along with on the field development, there is also an off-the-field development component that is equally important. Other factors such as team camaraderie as well as the teaching of life skills was a big factor in developing not just great athletes, but responsible and stand-up citizens using sport as the tool to bring this about.

Sport Specific Development

Sport specific development explains the process of how a player matures and develops strictly on the playing field. Everything that he or she does to improve in this theme is done within the confines of the playing field. With that being said, how each coach goes about developing their players can be very different. For example, sport specific development at each age is different. When interviewing John, he said that there

was a universal process in which the coaches developed their soccer players. Roger confirmed this in the interview stating that they develop their players in stages. At the U9 to U11 level, the focus is about developing individual technique and ability. As the players age up to U13 and U14, they start taking more ownership in their own game. They begin to figure out which way is the best way for them to play the game. Finally at U16 all the way up to U18, the players start to learn how to play and win as a team as well as adjusting to different opponents.

John coached the top U9 boys team during the observations. The U9 level is very technically based with an emphasis on playing the most basic parts of the game (keeping head up while dribbling, having a good first touch, using all sides of the foot) the proper way. Not only do the U9's play on a smaller field with fewer players on the field at a time, but no one has been designated a position on the field yet. John and the Academy do this in order to see which position each player eventually migrates to on their own. In other words, coaches are looking to see which position the player initially has the most fun playing. During John's U9 practices, he always focuses much of the beginning on juggling and the coordination and balance that comes with it. Throughout the practices, John focuses an ample amount of time on playing proper defense, not being afraid to use the non-dominant foot to kick the ball, and communicating with each teammate. While each of these aspects of soccer may seem elementary, the U9s constantly work on these fundamentals in order to be best prepared for the next year when they move up an age group and are expected to have a better grasp at the simple technical parts of the game from day one. He explained in the interview that when developing the top players "It

means that we want them to basically be comfortable on the ball." That comfort on the ball is intended to be grasped at an early age and eventually translated to when they are placed in situations with high expectation. John's idea of on-field development has indeed helped many U9 players seamlessly move up an age group. However, this type of development is not used at every age group.

Sid's idea of on-field development was very similar. During his high school practices, his main focus was to "keep it simple" as he mentioned it several times in his interview. He continued with saying "If you can't trap and pass the ball, you cannot enjoy the game." In other words, he begins much of his teaching by ensuring that his players have a good understanding of the fundamentals in order to not just enjoy the game, but to be able to play the game properly. He also stated that "[Soccer] is a simple game. We complicate it too much, but it's a simple game…. If you can learn to pass and trap the ball, you can spend a long time in the game. So it's a simple game." Even though John and Sid coach players of different ages, much of what they taught their players revolved around learning the fundamentals.

Chuck coached the game differently. He is in charge of one of the top ranked U14 boys' team in the Southeast. In his interview, he stated that "I have an appreciation for the tactical side of the game." This was prevalent when he was observed at practice. The theme of one of the practices was "speed of play." For Chuck, there is always a theme for each week of practice. The theme is made up of what they struggled with during their previous match. After a warm-up that included quick dribbling drills and juggling, he went into drills that emphasized the analytical and tactical parts of soccer. He began with

a drill involving one-touch passing in order to quickly move the ball up the field. The intensity of the drill was high from the players as if they were simulating a real live match. The drill began on a small field but as the week went on, the size of the field became bigger which gave the players more time. As a result, the players were better able to control the ball because the speed of play became slower with the larger field. To Chuck, sport specific development was about developing every aspect of the player. These aspects included three areas: the technical, the tactical, and the psychological, With one becoming more prevalent than the last as the players got older. During the middle of practice, he discussed the psychological part almost verbatim as he explained in the interview. In the interview he explained how the psychological part deals with "responding to failure" and "including failure as part of the process of becoming." During practice he told his players "What I'm looking for is how you respond to failures" meaning how they are going to react the play after they made a mistake on the field. Chuck's coaching style, although very different than John's for obvious reasons, has proven to yield successful results. He uses this coaching style for his U14 boys' team which is currently ranked in the top 30 nationally. The tactical side of the game is something that his players responded well to learning and have had much success with. The various on-field development processes that are implemented by the coaches at the Academy has proven to yield favorable results.

Life Skills Development

Along with the sport specific development that is done on the field, another equally important component in athlete development is the development of off-the-field

life skills through sport. Matt mentioned was the camaraderie amongst the players has changed. Since players are not just playing matches and then going home anymore. They are travelling on airplanes, staying in hotels, and eating dinners together. Camaraderie and friendship off the field is becoming more important. He states that "They wanna win, but they wanna enjoy the camaraderie so you've gotta build that team spirit and team chemistry and camaraderie." The team bonding activities are becoming an equally important off-the-field component that translates over to on-the-field results. With high level youth soccer increasingly becoming a year round sport, more time is starting to be spent off-the-field with players and coaches. With that there needs to be an acknowledgement that this is an opportunity for these players to gain lifelong friends as well as see that there is a life outside of soccer.

Along with Chuck talking about responding to failure on the field, John mentions failure and one's response to it off the field. Many players that he trains are often A and B students in the classroom. As he stated in the interview, "When they receive Cs it can sometimes be tough for them to handle…How do we as a team respond when somebody wants to point the finger at somebody because now we made a C as a team?" He mentioned this as a way of his team preparing for a mental challenge and how they will respond in either the real world or on the soccer field when something does not go their way. Much of the development at the older ages deals with maturity above the shoulders. They already have the physical tools to succeed at the highest level, but many of the players still lack the psychological maturity needed to excel at that same level. Instead of complaining because something did not go their way, John works on getting his players

to develop an attitude in which his players see every failure as an opportunity to make themselves better, even if it is not what they ideally planned. John elaborated on this in his interview

> If you take a look at the players that come into college, OK, and I see them going in there regularly. I see them in our own club. And let's just say that [the local university soccer coach] recruits 10 freshmen. They're all good players, that's not an issue. The issue is now mentality-wise, how can they handle what's coming, all 10 of them is not gonna start, all 10 of them think they're gonna start, all 10 of them think they're gonna come in and change the culture of Clemson soccer. And when 6 of them don't, how do they handle it? They're all coming in used to being the best player on their teams. They're still good soccer players, that hasn't changed. The mentality has changed. Now the mentality of how do I… 'OK I'm not starting here. How do I handle this challenge? How do I work hard every day so when my chance comes, I'm ready to play'.

This type of development, although important on the field, can be equally important off the field when faced with adversity in the real world. Learning how to effectively deal with it on the soccer field will help players effectively deal with it off the field. Soccer, like many sports, can be translated into something greater than the sport itself. It can help athletes in real-time situations such as accountability, responsibility, teamwork, and selflessness. Many great coaches are ones that teach these life lessons through the sport that they coach.

The resulting achievement that comes from coaches challenging their players, putting them through grueling competition, and pressuring them with high expectations is success. The coaches at this club have had success at every age and gender. They continue to create a challenging environment for their players as well as constantly pushing them by setting the bar high during the season. John mentioned in the interview about getting his older players into the habit of correctly handling success. He stated

> That's what comes with experience for the 16 and 17 year olds. How to handle that. How to enjoy winning and even though with youth soccer, you know, we win a game 1-0 and someone said 'How did you do?' And I'll say that was a good professional win. Learned how to win. It's a good habit. They know how to do it. They held onto the game, they didn't panic, they didn't play great, but they found a way to win the game.

Matches such as that where they didn't play great but still found a way to win is a common entity among many successful teams. Some of it comes from getting used to playing with the same teammates over the course of a few years, but another part is being aware of what to do when one's team is ahead and understanding how to handle those high expectations. Success is something that comes from experience of being in high-intensity situations and knowing what to do when a team is up a goal with just a few minutes left to play. More opportunities in that situation breed for more chances for teams to feel success.

Chuck said that success on his team comes from learning from mistakes and failures. He goes on to say

The psychological piece is very important with high level players… you know, how do we rebound from failure and I think that, for me, and what I try and do is help them include failing as part of the process of becoming… as opposed to a road block or 'Let's turn and go the other way' or being too introspective about it. Learning from it but being able to include that as part of the process of being successful. That's what champions do. So that's what I try and, from a psychological side of it, dealing with injuries, and dealing with a loss of playing time, role change within the group. So those are… the psychological piece is huge, how to win and then how I deal with success. Huge piece to a high level athlete.

Not only does dealing with failure predicate success on the soccer field, but it also translates to many different off the field instances (losing a job, failing an exam, or going bankrupt to name a few) that can sometimes come before someone succeeds. Chuck always tells his players that success comes after losing that important match or making a big mistake. From there, he has gotten his players to learn to accept failure and move on to the next match in order to succeed.

Coach/Athlete Relationship

The relationship that each player has with their coach is another important component when dealing with athlete development. Each coach sees their players several times a week as well as travels with them on many weekends. The increase in travel not only helps with the camaraderie between the players, but also helps with the relationship that a coach has with their players. Some coaches interviewed put more of an emphasis

on the relationship than others, but each of them mentioned the importance of the relationship between the coaches and athletes. Roger was a big proponent of relationship building. He stated "I enjoy building these relationships with the players and watching them grow." He mentioned that much of this dates back to his time as a teacher and being a mentor with his students and taking that same approach to coaching his athletes.

However, the task of a coach building a relationship with his players can be approached differently. Matt explains in the interview that his approach to his players is not "warm and fuzzy" in the beginning like some coaches, but rather to the point and aggressive in terms of how he wants his players to conduct themselves and how he wants them to act. With this type of relationship building, he hopes to gain their respect first and in turn, make the game fun for them. Some coaches use an approach that makes players comfortable round them while others look to gain respect of the players first. Each of them is different and has worked in their own way and is yet another aspect of how two completely different ways of coaching can put produce favorable results from the athletes.

This relationship building has not only just occurred when these coaches are teaching players. The coaches that they built the best relationships from were the ones that not made them work harder, but made the players *want* to work hard for that coach. Matt explained this in his interview stating "But if that means more to me than it does to them and kids are finishing the year saying 'Are we starting again now?' I want them saying 'Hey when are we starting again?"

Matt continued to explain in the interview that "When you're a young player, there are certain coaches that grab your attention that make you want to play and train more often." Building a proper relationship with a player is very important in the development of the athlete because of the possibility of getting the most out of each player. With a proper relationship built, like Matt said, players will in turn give more of an effort and do everything they can for the coach and the team. The relationship between the athlete and coach, although may not be the most important aspect of developing an athlete on the field, is still a large factor in what a good relationship and a bad relationship translate to on the field of play in competition.

Where Does Fun Fit?

The development of each athlete is a process that involves many different aspects that include both on-the-field and off-the-field experiences. Obviously there is much that these athletes gain from playing soccer for hours upon hours every week, but there is also another factor of developing characteristics that can help them in places other than the soccer field. With that being said, there must be an incentive for these players to continue to come back even after a tough practice. This is where fun plays an important role in the development of an athlete. If the athlete is no longer enjoying himself, there is no reason for him to continue coming back. The development of the whole person through soccer is something that these coaches strive to achieve, but the coaches can easily lose these players if there is no fun in the process. Matt explained this in his interview by saying

> And is [training] fun? A lot of kids find that…think about it, I'm sure you saw it
>
> to yourself, think of how many kids, you know, high school senior "He's signing

with [local university].” Great. “What happened to him?” “Oh he quit after a

year.” “Why?” “Because he didn’t play. It wasn’t fun.”

Taking the fun out of the sport will eventually cause the player to lose interest and

ultimately quit. Player development focuses on many different factors that help in

developing the whole player, but if fun is not at the core of the development, the player is

not likely to stick with playing that sport.

Positive Motivational Climate

One area that the coaches stress is creating an environment that positively

motivates each player at every age level to improve their game. The development of a

positive motivational climate for the players focuses on providing them an environment

that promotes the improvement of their skills while at practice, but outside of practice as

well. The drills as well as the structure of the practices, intends to motivate the players in

a way that allows them to improve while keeping the same enjoyment in the game.

Fostering this positive motivation for each player keeps each player’s enjoyment of the

game at a high level and allows them to autonomously improve their game when they are

not at practice.

Each coach has their own unique ways of promoting motivation which is one of

the reasons that the Academy they work at has become one that players from all over the

state of South Carolina come to train at. During one of Chuck’s practices, he said that, a

few years ago, they had a player come train a couple of days a week from Baton Rouge,

Louisiana. He joined one of the academy’s teams as a temporary fill-in player while some

of their injured players got healthier. After competing with the team and being exposed to

the environment and climate that they always train in, he wanted to be a part of the Academy. This is just one example of how important creating a competitive and motivational environment is for these elite players. Many athletes live near other academies that are much closer to their homes, but these programs do not motivate their players or have an environment as conducive as the one they are at. Each coach has a different perception of what should be included in a positive motivational climate. John explains that his motivational climate is more about autonomy and getting his players to motivate themselves by saying

> I can be accused of not motivating my players. And I say that I'm a firm believer in having players make decisions. I'm a firm believer in that the players are the ones playing the game. Now that has to start in practice. That has to be me putting them in situations where they have to make decisions.

Other coaches take a different approaches based on each individual player. Chuck motivates each player differently based on their own personalities. In his interview he stated "some of them… again it's something tangible. Some of them are mature and have a different outlook … So it's a balancing act. You gotta kinda play all those things at one time." Each player and coach has a different way in which they approach motivation. Some are fairly simple while others are more structured. However, it was agreed upon that creating that positive motivational climate is something that not only brings in the best players, but improves the players they already have.

Motivation

One thing that each coach tried to do to implement an effective motivational climate was to encourage practice outside the playing field from his players. Matt encouraged motivation from his players with a juggling drill at the beginning of every practice. Each practice began with 12 minutes of six different juggling drills at 2 minutes each. First 2 minutes the players would juggle with both feet, then left foot only, right foot only, thighs, head, and alternating feet. Each juggling session was timed and the players had to keep track of how many times the ball hit the ground. The goal was to have zero or one balls hit the ground over each 2 minute span. This was something that the players could easily practice on their own as well as an indicator of who was practicing on their own outside of practice. The players who would not let the ball hit for the two minute duration were ecstatic when time was called and it also added an element of fun at the beginning of every practice that the players could look forward to.

Another way that the coaches facilitated motivation in their practices was through challenging their players. In order to keep things exciting and Fun for his more talented players, Roger would challenge his better players in practice by telling them "You gotta play completely left footed on Tuesdays and completely right footed on Wednesdays." It doesn't stop with just practices. Roger would also challenge his better players to score two goals in a match or dribble through all the defenders on the opposing team. Since the players he is challenging are better than most of the players on the team, challenging them with difficult tasks was one way to motivate them to continue to improve while keeping them engaged in practices.

Along with different ways to motivate, coaches must also be aware that each player is motivated differently. Chuck stated in the interview that each player needs to be approached differently in regards to motivating them

> And some of them are purists. They wanna do well because they want their game to be attractive. The way they play to be attractive. So they're purists and some of them are intrinsically motivated. Some of them just have to be the best. They have to do real well. So it's all different at trying to identify who those types of people are and what motivates them. Some of them is fear of loss. Let's be honest. It's a fear of loss. So we do that. Some of them are pleasers. They wanna please you as the authoritative figure. And so that's what motivates them. So it's a balancing act. You gotta kinda play all those things at one time.

Each player has something different that they are motivated by and it is the coach's job to recognize those buttons to push and try to get the best out of each player with a more personalized way of challenging each player.

Environment

The environment that has been created by the coaches is another factor that makes this soccer Academy one of the best in South Carolina. One thing that was immediately noticed while observing the coaches is the fact that every player in the whole soccer complex was wearing the same exact shirt. Each player is given 3 blue practice jerseys that they are required to wear at every practice. John explained that they do this so the parents and players aren't "Keeping up with the Joneses" and trying to outdo one another with wearing the newest jersey from their favorite club. Having everyone wearing the

same shirt puts the focus mainly on getting the players better and eliminates the possibility of practice becoming part fashion show. As well as the same shirt, Chuck also makes his players wear black socks and shorts to his practices. This creates a more professional looking team for when they travel and helps create the environment that soccer is the number one priority at the Academy.

As well as creating a similar environment through what each player is wearing, the coaches create an environment that is needed to compete and win matches. John stated in the interview that "I firmly believe that the winning will take care of itself if you do what you're supposed to do in practice, get your kids ready, and put them in the environment they need to be in to play games." The environment they need to be in, John states, is in part his responsibility as well as his players'. He says that there must be high expectations from within the players that comes from themselves as well as high expectations on him to prepare his players the best he can for the matches. Overall, the environment that John as well as all of the coaches tries to create is one where they have prepared their players to their fullest potential in practice and now have to play with the high expectations of competing against another team. Much of this environment consists of coaches constantly preparing their players with simulations of game environments in practice. The coaches set up different scenarios that best prepare them for what they are most likely going to see in a game. Each environment from each coach can be different, but the overall goal of preparing each player the best they can for competition is something that does not change.

The environment that Chuck creates consists of an all-around preparation for his top level players. He says that he looks to create an environment that deals with the physical, psychological, as well as the nutritional aspects of elite level soccer players. First of all, he creates an environment in practice that simulates what will be seen in matches. Chuck stated in the interview that "The training environment is critical. So that's one thing, maybe something that is a preference thing based on the coach is visualization. I'm huge about visualization. Being able to imagine yourself doing well whether it's a certain instance or a certain point in the game. First ten minutes, last ten minutes of halves in soccer: huge." The functional aspect of soccer and being able to master what the team has worked on in practice and duplicate it in matches is something that is critical to him when creating a winning environment. The psychological piece is equally important. Learning how to properly deal with success and failure on the field will help the older players who are getting ready for college. As John stated before, not many players will come into their new college team and immediately start their freshman year. Players must learn to deal with these setbacks in order to become a better player in the future. Finally, the nutritional part is another important piece that Chuck mentions about his players "Taking care of their bodies, the health piece to that, the dieting, the nutritional piece to all of it is important." At the end of one of his team's grueling practices, he stressed the importance of not only getting some food and fluids into their bodies, but getting the right nutrients in their body in order for them to recover more quickly and be ready for their tournament in the in upcoming weekend. For Chuck, the

environment he creates comes full circle with every aspect of soccer that a player needs to focus on to become successful.

The environment of sports is one that has changed dramatically. The coaches who scream and belittle their players at practice are not coaching anymore. In fact, recently there have even been college coaches that have been fired because of their poor treatment of their players as well as the abetting of an unsafe and sometimes scary environment for their players. Coaching practices continue to evolve. Matt stated that

There's some things you change naturally as you evolve as a coach. There's certain things you never wanna lose. You don't wanna lose sight of the fact that if they're not enjoying playing for you and enjoying the game, kids will quit playing the game. That's been proven over time.

During one of his practices, Matt also explained how you can't have a "My way or the highway" mentality in coaching anymore. One must adapt to their players in order for them to reach their full potential. Player's game styles change over the year, rules of each sport sometimes change, strategies that work and do not work constantly alter depending on the teams that are being coached. With all of these changes or tweaks occurring in every feature of sports, it only makes sense that coaches must occasionally change their approach to coaching to best mesh with the players and the system they are operating under. As far as the environment one must create, he said

I think there's nothing wrong with being a macho athlete who works hard and tackles hard, but also treats people properly, and as coaches we've gotta encourage that environment in our club and that's where we get a chance to

separate ourselves from others. And specifically in our training session, you may

be over here training your team and cursing at them. Well some parents may say

'Oh yeah he's really getting into those kids.' I'm saying he can't communicate

properly. So I want to be a tough, hard coach, but also wanna be somebody that

kids are comfortable having a conversation with not just about soccer.

Creating an unintimidating environment for their players is something that each coach

strives to establish. Without it, they lose players to other academies who treat their player

more fairly and with respect.

Where Does Fun Fit?

Fun fits into the Positive Motivational Climate section as the base for what each

motivational tactic used should contain. As stated from the interviews, there are several

different motivational tools that coaches implement to get the most out of their players.

However, ensuring that the players are enjoying themselves is something that is at the

forefront of motivating players positively Roger explained the importance of fun when

training and motivating his players

… it's how do you make sure they have fun, it's almost the other way: how do

you not suck the fun out of it. Girls are there because it's fun. And you wanna

make sure that you don't suck the fun out of it. If it isn't fun, they're not coming.

Through observations of these coaches, a positive motivational climate was implemented

in different ways. However, there was an agreement that, without the existence of fun,

coaches cannot motivate their players to get the most out of their players.

Coach Development

While the effective development of players is a very important component of being a successful coach at the elite level, the ability to continually develop as a coach is equally important. Coach development simply refers to the growth and knowledge of each coach. The ideas of adjusting to each team they face as well as each player they coach and always learning new tactics and learning from other coaches highlight what is meant by developing as a coach. What has allowed these coaches to stay successful revolves around these two concepts and actively attempting to improve as a coach.

Roger stated that he often focuses on self-reflection and asks himself "Tonight at training, was I the person that I wanted to be? Was I the coach I wanted to be?" Development through constant self-reflection is just one of many methods coaches can use to develop and mature as a coach. The game is always changing and in order for a coach at the top level to maintain success, he or she must be willing to constantly develop and learn new strategies and ways of thinking in order to continue their success at the elite level. Coach development has been broken down into the two areas of adjustment and coach learning that best include each aspect of what coaches need to do in order to continue to develop into the best coach they can possibly be for their players.

Adjustment

The first area that is critical in development as a coach is adjustment. What is meant by adjustment as a coach is not only are they adjusting their practices to best help their players improve, but they are also adjusting the ways they interact and approach their players as well. John and Sid both had the mindset when they first started coaching

to be a "yeller and a screamer" to their players. However, through time and experience, they have adjusted the way they have coached to be more conducive to how their players will best learn. John, who is also the executive director of the academy, stated that because of his position, he has adjusted his way of coaching to one that is most favorable for running a top notch academy. He claimed "I've got 40 coaches working for me. So part of it is I've gotta set the example. I gotta lead by example too." According to John, yelling and screaming is not the type of coaching style he wants his academy to be known for. Accordingly, his on-field demeanor is one of how he wants his academy to be perceived as. Sid mentioned how he has had to adjust his overall demeanor as well. He stated

> I'm a yeller and screamer, but I think I yell and scream differently. I yell and
> scream instructions… you know… you get a lot of coaches who would yank a kid
> or yell at a kid if they did something bad. So that doesn't [approve with me].

Both of these coaches started out coaching a way that is very different to the current way they coach. Although this coaching style may be something that is currently working for them, they continue to adjust it in order to get the best out of the players they are coaching.

Adjusting as a coach also means tweaking areas from the tactical and mental side of the game as well. In his interview, Roger told of adjustments he makes during preparation for competition. Stating that every team is different, he proclaimed

> How do you have players that can identify and kinda take the cognitive side of the
> game 'Hey we're playing this team which is a little different than that team. How

are we gonna adjust today? What's the style of play that they play? How are we

gonna adapt to that? What's the situation of the game? From a physical

standpoint, we played yesterday and we don't have a lot of rest or we haven't

played in a week and we're off' all of those kind of things…"

A major component of this is being able to understand each aspect of soccer and

acknowledge that there may be some changes that need to be made. A coach must be able

to adjust his or her style of play on the field in order to best adapt to what is being used

by the opposing team. Without on-field adjustment and a one-dimension type of playing

style, teams will not only have a better chance of losing, but players will not mature

mentally for the next step in their game.

Chuck uses adjustments when referring to improving each of his players. In the

interview as well as the observation, he mentioned the importance of losing as it relates to

getting better. When Chuck talked about how sports is a great avenue to learn how to

compete, he also referenced losing as a great opportunity when it came to player

improvement. He elaborated that he has his players deal with losing by putting everything

into perspective. He went on to say

It's not a concession, but perspective does bring clarity. Typically you find out

more about yourselves, you're more open to learning, you're more open to

constructive criticism when you've lost. So that's a great time to make

adjustments, again, to gain perspective, to figure out how to move forward.

Chuck made this point in one of his practices as well when he explained that Michael

Jordan missed over 60 game winning shots in his career. He told his players that because

of those failures, he was able to learn from them and become the greatest basketball player to play the game. Whether it be winning or losing, there always come teachable moments in coaching that deal with a certain change or adjustment in order to continue to get better as a player.

Matt stated that his biggest change came from how he approached coaching. He went on to say "I've also had to spend a lot of time individually with players and I think that I think is the biggest change in my coaching kinda… the way I go about dealing with players is very individual now." During one of his practices, he stated that the "my way or the highway" style of coaching that was more prevalent years ago is not something that is seen as much today because of the variety of different types of players that there are. Along with adjusting to each player, he has also adjusted to the competition and development culture around athletics. When he was a younger coach, he explained about the importance of winning he placed on himself. On putting too much of an emphasis on winning, Matt stated that

> After a while you start to say if the only reason I'm coaching is for that [winning], then what do I do when I lose? That's kinda what I got to at one point was 'OK we just lost 4 times in a row.' Does that mean I'm no good? No. That means that's part of athletics.

Winning and losing are routine parts of sports, but adjustment to how coaches deal with each is something that is vital to a coach's overall development.

Adjustment comes in many forms. It can be a coach adjusting his or her teaching styles in order to stay relevant with an ever-changing and growing game. It can also come

in the form of teaching a wide array of various tactical game styles that help increase the amount of preparation during competition. They can even come in the shape of winning and losing and making changes from the perspective of both the coach and the player. What was made clear in each interview is the fact that each one does not coach the same way in which they initially began coaching. There is constant reflection and thought of how to be a better coach to each kid on top of being a better mentor and having a better relationship with each.

Learning

Along with a coach adjusting to a wide array of different aspects of the game, each coach must also incorporate a constant thirst for knowledge in order for them to remain coaching at the highest level. Each coach mentioned how they are always learning from themselves as well as others and that is one reason that has allowed them to continue to have success. John made an interesting point in the way he learns from others. His learning not only consists of gaining knowledge of how to act, but also how *not* to act. When referring to some coaches, he stated "Sometimes…I'll go back and say 'Hey, I wanna make sure I'm never like that [coach]. I wanna make sure that I'm not red in the gills.'" Coaching in a manner that is enjoyable and fun for him is the initial step learning how not to act has helped him to continue to enjoy coaching. The knowledge he gains does is not solely from collegiate or nationally recognized club coaches. He mentioned that he learns from every kind of coach saying "I've picked up stuff from recreational coaches who have no badges, who have no licenses, who have no nothing, just by the demeanor and how they deal with people." The non-soccer elements of

coaching are great learning points as well, and John has learned from recreation coaches in that aspect.

As said before, Roger uses self-reflection when it comes to learning and being a better coach. In the interview, he explained about what he does post-practice in order to better gain perspective of how he can get better, asking himself things like

Tonight at training, was I the person that I wanted to be? Was I the coach I wanted to be? Because there's not always a boss looking over your shoulder or evaluating you saying 'Hey you did a good job here, you did a good job there,' you've got to do that yourself.

A want to get better and as both a coach and a person is something that sometimes takes an intrinsic approach because oftentimes there is no one watching the way one conducts themselves. Appropriately, there needs to be accountability from each coach to try and better themselves for their players.

One fairly new aspect of the game Matt continues learn is the increased notoriety youth sports have gained in the past years. More than ever, players are being recruited at a younger age and are being flown all over the country for tournaments. Accordingly, coaches are able to make a living doing this. A career that was unheard of having ten years ago. Because of this, coaches must always learn new ways of helping increase the exposure of their players. Updating their website as well as keeping in contact with college coaches are just a couple of things that coaches must now add to their list of things to do because of the increase in popularity of elite level youth sports. It is a career

that one can have for a long time, but as soon as a coach stops learning and improving themselves, they will be replaced with someone who is willing to keep learning.

A coach must have a willingness to learn from others in order to keep growing. Although Chuck stated that "without a doubt" he is always learning from others and trying to get better as a coach, he mentioned that one must have an "open mind" when wanting to get better and gain more knowledge. He stated

As you grow older and you get more experience, you gain more experience, you're around quality people, whether you're coaching with them or against them, certainly I learned from those guys as well, I think that you hopefully do evolve into a better coach, a better manager of people, a better identifier of talent, a better coach, technically.

A willingness to learn new things will undoubtedly help a coach out when it comes to obtaining new knowledge about coaching.

There was not a coach who was interviewed or observed who has kept the same mentality throughout their years of coaching. They have evolved just as their players and the game have. The development of a coach depends on the constant learning and self-refection that comes from their own desire to understand the game better. Fun comes into this section in the form of that and the enjoyment they get from learning and teaching new aspects of the game and the subsequent success that they and their players experience because of the acquisition of new knowledge. A coach constantly learning and trying to get better is a coach that will continue to succeed not only because they are

willing to adapt to an ever-changing game, but they will always have the ability to teach every aspect of the game to their players and, in turn, make them successful athletes.

Where Does Fun Fit?

One thing that each coach has in common with the others is the fact that they played competitive soccer in college. They all grew up enjoying the sport and turned the passion they have for soccer into a career in coaching. Each of them has a love for the sport that they want to give back to youth who share the same passion and excitement. For a lot of these players and coaches, the idea of serious leisure is fun for them. The high level of competition they face is a form of enjoyment. Therefore, as a coach, in order to stay competitive, they must continue to develop as coaches by learning new techniques and approaches while also teaching several different types of players. Many of these players find fun in leisure where there is more expected out of them. Overall, these coaches have turned a sport that they enjoyed as a player into a career in which they can teach the sport they enjoyed in the competitive manner that they enjoyed it in.

Conclusion

In their interviews and practices, these coaches discussed and demonstrated many different coaching practices and strategies. Even though each was different than the others, there was much parity among their teaching styles that fit within the Elite Level Youth Coaching Model. Although different, each demonstrated traits which exemplified the themes of Managed Competition, Positive Motivational Climate, Athlete Development and Coach Development with the inclusion of fun implemented into each theme. Coaches have different personalities, biases, and teaching tools that make them

different. There is no universally accepted way to coach, however, with a lack of what should be included in a proper coaching philosophy, there is a need for a framework to be developed that includes themes that many coaches use to effectively coach youths at the elite level.

The Elite Level Youth Coaching Model takes the most important aspects of what was said by the coaches in their interviews and observed in practices and puts them into themes and sub themes to be applied by a wide array coaches regardless of personality, biases, or unique philosophes. With this, there will be better idea of what coaches should include in their teachings as well as give coaches who are new to elite level youth sports a framework for which they can use to most effectively coach his or her players.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary

The research conducted looks at elite level youth coaches and the coaching

philosophies they use. Prior research suggests that sports are a very important factor that

help with positive growth and development for youth beginning at a young age and going

well into their adult lives (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, and Heke, 2004). Such research also

suggests that coaches are an integral piece in the provision of youth sports (Gould,

Collins, Lauer, and Chung, 2007). Because coaches are such an important part of the

youth sport experience, the development of an effective coaching philosophy is also a

vital part of coaching youth sports. Martens (2004) states that with the development of a

sound philosophy by coaches, the development of young athletes can be more effective.

Other research on coaching philosophies shows that without a sound philosophy, coaches

regularly experience inconsistencies in their coaching regarding inappropriate behavior,

communication, playing time, and the emphasis on winning (Collins et al., 2011).

Data collection of the research was done in two phases: semi-structured

interviews and observations. The interviews were conducted with each of the 5 soccer

coaches by asking them questions regarding their own personal coaching and teaching

styles. The questions asked were developed from the Martens (2004) research revolving

around the three elements of winning, development, and fun that should be applied to

coaching youth sports. Following the interviews, observations were conducted at the

practices or matches of the coaches to see if what they expressed in the interviews was in

fact what they demonstrated on the field. From there, a coaching model was developed which applied what was said by the coaches in the interview and what was observed in their practices or matches. The model consisted of four themes. Each theme included 2-4 subthemes with the element of fun connected through each of them. The four themes of Managed Competition, Athlete Development, Positive Motivational Climate and Coach Development exemplify four distinct areas in which each coach demonstrated elements of each through their own personal coaching style, influences, and personal view of the game.

Each coach was different in the ways they interacted with their players, how they conducted their practices, and their own personalities. However, each of them demonstrated many similarities regarding the four themes. When examining and interviewing each coach, they each exemplified different strategies and methods in which they thought was the best way to coach their players. Although there were some similarities among these coaches, none of them coached the game exactly like another. However, each coach has produced winning teams at different age levels and genders. The Elite Level Youth Sport Model takes an important piece that each coach, regardless of personality or teaching style, must account for when he or she is coaching high level young athletes. Athlete Development, Managed Competition, Positive Motivational Climate, and Coaching Development along with the element of fun interconnected within each are all areas that successful coaches, regardless of how they coach their players, must incorporate into their coaching plan in order to produce winning teams and develop well-rounded young athletes.

Similarities in Research

The research done explained that coach was different in how they coached their players. Previous research on coaching philosophies has a similar take. Collins et al. (2011) states that there is such a wide range of different yet equally effective ways to coach players. Because of this, there still remains a gap in what exactly should be included in an effective universal coaching philosophy along with how to develop an effective one. Another similarity regarding the research was the importance of fun expressed both by previous research as well as the coaches interviewed. Each coach said that fun was the most important aspect in coaching youth soccer which mirrors the overall view of much of the research done on youth sports (Mitchell, Griffin, & Oslin, 1994 and Turner & Martinek, 1995). The element of winning was another attribute seen in both the prior research as well as the coaches interviewed. It was agreed upon by both the coaches and the research that winning was something strived for. The coaches explained how winning increases the outside perception of a coach's ability to coach. They said it also increases the amount of opportunities given to the players regarding competition and exposure. However, winning was not necessarily something that they judged themselves on pertaining to how they perceived themselves. Cumming et. al, (2007) and Smith et al. (1978) both stated that a team's win-loss record was not the main indicator in how much the players enjoyed the coach. Rather it was the coach's knowledge of the game that was more of a factor in the player's enjoyment. The answers given by the coaches as well as their actions on the field brought about many similarities relating to the research already done on youth sports.

Differences in Research

While there were not many differences regarding the previous research done on youth sports and the current research on coaching philosophies, there is one area that may yield different results. Recreation coaches and elite level youth coaches were both present at the academy. Although research was done strictly on the high level youth coaches at the academy, there was an abundance of recreation coaches that volunteered their time to coach various recreation teams. It must be noted that the coaching model developed is made made in regards to elite level youth coaches only and may not reflect what would be found if the same process was done for recreational coaches. While there may be some similarities, the differences that may come up could possibly lead to an ineffective way to coach youth at the recreational level. Future research on this is needed, but one could speculate that the differences in the coaching philosophies used with recreation level players might be different.

Future Research

Since this research was performed strictly with high level youth coaches, there is much opportunity for future research to be done on various coaching levels. Other types such as recreational teams as well as the lower-tiered soccer teams at the academy would be a direction for further research. Future research could be done to benefit every level of coaching in youth sports.

As well as looking into other levels, other sports could be examined in order to see if the coaching philosophies in elite level youth soccer were similar with other high level youth sports. This prospective research would examine the approaches used in

soccer that have yielded successful results and compare them to other high level sports teams with similar expectations. The coaching framework that was developed from researching soccer coaches compared to other sports would create a better understanding of what is different in the core coaching elements of each sport and what should be included in each sport-specific Elite Level Youth Sport Coaching Model.

While this research was strictly qualitative, a quantitative approach could yield additional information. What is interpreted in the interviews as well as the observations can differ for each researcher, but a quantitative look at the core elements of each coaching philosophy through surveys could mean for a larger sample size of what what each coach believes should be included in a proper coaching philosophy.

Limitations

Three key limitations allow for more in-depth research to be conducted on coaching philosophies. Although there was ample amount of data for each coach, only five were interviewed for this study. A larger sample size could be used to further validate what should be contained in a coaching philosophy as well as the possibility for more themes and sub-themes in order to create more depth in the Elite Youth Level Coaching Model. Also, since the observations consisted mainly of practices with limited interaction of sanctioned competition, an examination of coaches before, during, and after matches could give more substance to how the philosophies are enacted by each coach. An expansion of the number of coaches coupled with observations of each coach during matches would give way to more data as well as an opportunity to interpret another feature vital to high level youth coaches.

This research only contains data from the coaches interviewed. The parents and players were not involved in this project. Each coach had a different philosophy, but it is unclear if the way they governed their practices and carried themselves was indeed the best for each individual player. A look into how each player perceives their coach as well as what their parents think about the coach's approach to their practices would add another unique outlook as to whether or not each coach's personal philosophy is universally accepted. This would add another array of input that would factor in views from both a direct and indirect perspective.

Implications

This research is intended to better prepare coaches in facilitating a high level youth sports teams. Many people initially start coaching without a predetermined procedure of how to carry out practices or how to approach each player and team (Collins et al., 2011). Because of this, there is much inconsistency regarding coaches' initial plans and what is actually carried out. Factors such as playing time, the dealing with inappropriate behavior, communication and too much of an emphasis on winning are some of the consistencies experienced by coaches who do not have a coaching philosophy. Giving coaches a framework like the Elite Youth Level Coaching Model will allow coaches to have a more focused and organized approach for coaching elite level youth athletes when starting out.

This research will also allow for the development of organized coaching programs that implement research tips on managing competition for high level coaching. An integral part of the research of high level youth athletes revolves around the theme of

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managing competition. Therefore, it is imperative to implement these findings that have resulted in successful teams at the Academy. A presentation of these findings at coaching workshops and conventions will better educate high level youth coaches of what has been done in the past to garner successful results while keeping youth more engaged as well as retaining and acquiring new prospective athletes.

Overall, the implementation of a coaching framework such as the Elite Level Youth Coaching Model is becoming more necessary for high level youth sport coaches. In a relatively new industry, there is a dramatic increase in the number of youth wanting to play at a high level. Additionally, the amount of money that goes into training, travelling, competition, and showcases has increased as well. Because of this, coaches with a better idea of how to manage their players, teams, and competition are going to experience more success when obtaining the best players and playing matches. Coaches who are better educated to follow a framework such as the Elite Level Youth Coaching Model will not only follow a more consistent way of coaching, but will have a better understanding of what should be included in the practices and assembly of a high level youth sports team.

Conclusion

This research was done in order to give a better understanding of coaching philosophies of high level youth sport coaches. Prior research has explained the benefits of youth sports (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, and Heke, 2004), coaches (Gould, Collins, Lauer, and Chung, 2007), and the implementation of a coaching philosophy successfully (Martens, 2004, Collins et al. 2011, Wilcox and Trudel, 1998). However, there is little

known on what should be included in a coaching philosophy. With this research, more is known about what should be implemented in an effective coaching philosophy for high level youth sport coaches. This has become increasingly important because of the additional attention that has been put on high level youth sports within the last decade. Therefore, it is becoming imperative to have a coaching philosophy when dealing with higher level players along with increased expectations put on coaches to get their players to perform at a high level. The Elite Level Youth Coaching Model is a framework that can be applied to a wide array of coaches regardless of coaching style and personality. Although no coach is the same, the framework developed examines what has been implemented by the coaches at the Academy and provides four themes that revolve around the element of fun. The themes of Managed Competition, Positive Motivational Climate, Athlete Development, and Coach Development are all areas in which coaches coming from various playing and coaching backgrounds can effectively apply to their coaching philosophy. Future research can look at a larger sample size of coaches in order to confirm that this coaching framework is indeed something that can help high level youth sport coaches. Another form of research could look at other sports and see if the teachings implemented by those coaches mirror the philosophies found by the interviewed soccer coaches.

Coaching philosophies can come from an array of influences, backgrounds, and experiences. Although there are many different ways to look at coaching philosophies, within it lies a core framework around what many successful coaches have used. The implementation of this framework will give coaches a better understanding of what

should be included in their practices along with what should be taught to upcoming coaches getting into the field for the first time. High level youth sport coaches, although unique, possess similarities in their coaching styles that have made them successful. With these elements implemented, teams have a better opportunity to compete, coaches have a better idea of how to facilitate their team, and players can have a better experience when playing youth sports at a high level.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval

Dear Dr. Barcelona,

The chair of the Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) validated the protocol identified above using exempt review procedures and a determination was made on **April 22, 2013** that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as **Exempt** from continuing review under category **B2**, based on federal regulations 45 CFR 46. You may begin this study.

The approved consent document is attached for distribution.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB's approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) immediately. All team members are required to review the "Responsibilities of Principal Investigators" and the "Responsibilities of Research Team Members" available at http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/regulations.html.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please let us know if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Good luck with your study.

All the best,
Nalinee

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Appendix B

Coaching Checklist

A coaching checklist fill be filled out for each coach prior to the observation

portion of the research. Each checklist will contain the information that was given in the

interview to explain their coaching philosophy. The themes stated in the checklist will be

different observable aspects that can be seen through the viewing of the coach's practice.

Below is an example of what a coaching checklist may contain in order to affirm what

they say is in fact how they coach on the field.

- ❑ High Energy Coach

- ❑ Adaptive Game Plan

- ❑ Over preparation in Practice

- ❑ Focus on Keeping Things Light in Practice

- ❑ Effectively Communicating with Players

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