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"Just rollin'" : coaches' experience of NCAA Division III National Championship cross country teams

Colin Fisher Young
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Colin Fisher Young entitled ""Just rollin"' : coaches' experience of NCAA Division III National Championship cross country teams." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Human Performance and Sport Studies.

Leslee A. Fisher, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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"JUST ROLLIN':"

COACHES' EXPERIENCE OF NCAA DIVISION III NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP CROSS COUNTRY TEAMS

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Colin Fisher Young

December 2002

DEDICATION

To the six coaches of this study.

And to Mom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to those that helped make this study what it is. Thank you Dr. Fisher, my major advisor, for your care, enthusiasm, and thoroughness. Thank you to my committee members: Dr. Wrisberg for your assistance and idea to make this an existential-phenomenological study, and Dr. DeSensi for being so encouraging and helpful.

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Finally, thank you to the coaches of this study for teaching and inspiring.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of NCAA Division III National Championship cross country teams from the coaches' perspective. A deeper understanding of winning teams and coaches, particularly collegiate cross country teams, was sought. Six coaches participated in existential-phenomenological interviews in order to generate thorough descriptions of their championship teams.

Four major themes emerged from the coaches' experience of their National Championship teams, including: *attitude, cohesion, talent,* and *development.* These major themes, their respective subthemes, and examples of the participants' quotes, which revealed these themes, are described. Based on the results, recommendations for coaches, sport psychology consultants, and researchers are provided.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"I don't get goose bumps when I open my pay envelope, but look at me when I start talking about that 1982 [championship] team" (as cited in Zino, 1992, p.7), said Hall of Fame baseball player Robin Yount. After winning the 1991 Super Bowl, head coach Joe Gibbs stated, "There is something to saying, 'Hey, we won the championship.' But it was actually the thrill, it was the practices, the blood, the sweat, the losses, the wins, the climbing that ladder and getting to the Super Bowl and then winning it. That's the fun part, and that's what you remember" (as cited in Packer & Lazenby, 1998, p. 120). Both the athlete and coach quoted above suggest that their championship team experience held special significant for them. Certainly, asking *why* their teams won would be valuable in learning about team success, but perhaps, what would be more valuable is asking them about *what* the experience of their championship team was like. As sport psychology consultants Hansen and Newburg explain (1992):

> What better way for athletes or coaches to learn about success in their respective sports than through detailed, descriptive accounts of the lives of others who were in similar situations and have reached a high level of performance. Some believe that to be the best at something one must learn from the best. Though there is an inherent logic in this idea, it does not mean that people should model their lives after those they read about in qualitative research studies. Rather, it suggests that there might be something of value within the experiences of those who have succeeded that may benefit those who are striving to achieve a similar level of performance (p.49).

In the sport psychology literature, there are several qualitative studies that examine athletes' subjective descriptions of performance success (e.g., Dale, 1994; Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1992; Jackson, 1992; Newman, 1992; Parker, 1994; Ravizza,

1993; Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1991). However, there is a lack of sport psychology literature related to coaches' descriptions of successful team performance, particularly cross country teams. This study sought to contribute to filling the gap by illuminating the experience of coaches who have succeeded in team sports, specifically, NCAA Division III cross country coaches who have each won multiple National Championships.

What were these coaches' thoughts and feelings about their most successful championship team? How would they describe their best team? Would there be commonalities in their accounts? What was special about these coaches and their championship teams? These are questions of interest that this study aimed to address.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to interview six NCAA Division III coaches to generate descriptions of their most successful National Championship cross country teams. By examining their experience of these teams, a deeper understanding of winning teams and coaches, particularly collegiate cross-country teams and coaches, was sought. The principal research question addressed in this study, following the existential-phenomenological paradigm (see Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997), was: "What especially stands out to you about your most successful National Championship team?"

Significance of the Study

This study may further our knowledge base in sport psychology, as well as benefit the coaches who participated and other coaches, athletes, and sport psychology consultants who seek the characteristics of team success. First, the information given by the participants may add to our understanding of sport psychology. For example, sport

psychology consultant Ken Ravizza (1993) bases his method of consulting mainly on conversations with athletes and coaches, whom he claims, "are the real experts...The best performers have knowledge, insight, and experience that has led to the development of my approach to enhancing performance" (p. 2). The coaches of this study may further our understanding of collegiate cross country and championship team experience.

Second, it was hoped that the coaches participating in the study would find the interview useful. A common technique to enhance athletic performance employed by sport psychology consultants is to have performers describe their top performance. For instance, Terry Orlick asks runners with whom he consults, "Think of your all-time best performance(s) and respond to the following questions keeping that race(s) in mind: How did you feel just before that race? What were you saying to yourself or thinking shortly before the start of that race(s)? How were you focused during the race (e.g., what were you aware of, or paying attention to, on the way down the course)?" (Orlick, 1986, p. 139). The coaches in the interviews may have revisited or possibly made a discovery about what led them to success (Pollio et al., 1997). Also, by organizing and describing their experiences in the narrative form, the teams and the coaches' experience of them may have become more meaningful (Sommer & Baumeuster, 1998).

Finally, other coaches, athletes, and sport psychology consultants may be able to glean information from this study that they can apply to their focus. It is recommended not to view the experience of these coaches as an exact road map for success, but rather as a useful reference.

Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions apply to this study:

Cross country. Cross country is a Fall sport in college with the National Championship held in November. The race is primarily run on grass and is 8,000 meters for men and 5,000 for women in Division III. Each team runs seven athletes at the National Championship (NCAA, 2001).

Most successful National Championship team. The team that wins the National Championship race is the team with the lowest point total. The top five runners on each team score. The points correspond to the places that each team runner finishes. Athletes who qualify for Nationals without their team qualifying are excluded from the team scoring. After the individual qualifiers are taken out of the scoring, each place of the top five team members is added up. Therefore, if a team has runners that finish third, fourth, eleventh, fourteenth and twenty-third in the team scoring, they would have 55 points (3+4+11+14+23=55).

Since each of the head coaches in this study have won more than one National Championship in cross-country, they were asked to talk about the team that was their lowest scoring National Championship team.

NCAA Division III. The NCAA split into three divisions- Division I, II, and III- in 1973, mainly because "big-time" football institutions threatened leave the NCAA if proposals to share TV and bowl game revenues with all of the NCAA institutions passed (Fleisher, Goff, & Tollison, 1992). Also, the split was enacted to give more student-athletes a chance to compete in championships (Daniel, 1973). Now the differences in

divisions include academic and eligibility standards, sponsorship, basketball and football scheduling requirements, and financial aid (NCAA, 2002). Division III National Championships began for men in 1973 and for women in 1981.

The philosophy of NCAA Division III is to place the highest priority on the overall educational experience and completing one's academic program (Earle, 2001). To achieve this, Division III institutions: (a) emphasize participating rather than spectating; (b) award no athletic scholarships; (c) encourage the development of sportsmanship and positive social attitudes; (d) assure that athletes are not treated differently from other members of the student body; and (e) support student-athletes in their pursuit for high levels of athletic performance by providing adequate facilities, competent coaches, and appropriate competitive opportunities.

One of the Division III institutions represented in this study describes its athletic philosophy as follows:

> Athletics complement the total educational program. Athletic involvement is educational in the sense that athletes experience the total educational program. Athletic involvement is educational in the sense that athletes experience the expressiveness of movement, the creativity of competitive play, the joy of participation, the excitement of total involvement, the satisfaction of intense effort the motivation of goal setting...Athletes have an opportunity to learn and practice responsible personal behavior and social action as they develop such attributes as self-control, self-discipline, integrity, perseverance, stewardship of time, joy of group membership, social justice and respect for rules (Febus, 2002, p.1).

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions were relevant to this study:

1. The participants expressed their thoughts and feelings as honestly and as accurately as they could.

2. The participants were able to articulate their experiences with relative ease (Polkinghorne, 1989).

3. The existential-phenomenological interview is a valid method of obtaining descriptions of first-person experiences (Dale, 1994).

Limitations of the Study

Possible limitations of this study were as follows:

1. The championship teams that the participants discussed competed from between two and twelve years ago. The coaches may have had difficulty remembering specifics about these teams.

2. Some of the coaches may have been more interested in talking about their experience than others. They may have been more vocal and descriptive than other participants.

3. Each of the participants knew the researcher as a competitive athlete on National Championship teams. They may have assumed that the researcher understood what they were discussing without the need for thorough explanation, or they may have not felt complete anonymity because the researcher knew them.

Delimitations

This study included only six NCAA Division III cross country head coaches that had won at least two National Championships. The coaches and members of their teams were unique and had unique situations. Therefore, the reader should be careful about applying the experience of these coaches to different populations. However, insights

surely may be applicable to many collegiate cross country teams, and perhaps, to teams in general.

Included in the next chapter, The Review of Literature, is a brief analysis of sport psychology literature germane to the topic of team sport success. Included are descriptions of the group process, cohesion, and motivation. Finally, the qualitative method of existential-phenomenology is discussed.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter describes three major topics in sport psychology that are integral to the experience of competitive sport teams: the group process, cohesion, and motivation (Weinberg & Gould, 1999; Gill, 1986). Included in the discussion of the group process are: (a) the definition of a group or team; (b) the group operation; (c) and the stages of group development. The topic of cohesion is partitioned into: (a) definitions; (b) measurement; (c) importance; (d) clarification; and (e) correlates with other constructs. Motivation is explained by discussing its definition and three leading paradigms, including: (a) self-efficacy/collective efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1990); (b) intrinsic/extrinsic motivation (Deci, 1972); and (c) achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1989). Lastly, the research approach used in this study, existential-phenomenology, is briefly explained (Dale, 2000).

The Group Process

Definition of group. To differentiate a group or team from a collection of individuals, Carron and Hausenblas (1998) list five categories of requirements. The first category, *a common fate*, is the shared experience and outcome of a group. The second category, *a source of mutual benefit*, is the fact that a group may help the individuals gain something they cannot achieve alone. *Having a social structure* is the third category and refers to the positions, roles, norms of behavior, and status differences of a group. The fourth category, *having group processes*, involves the interactions that take place like

cooperation and communication. The fifth category is *self-categorization* where the group members consider themselves a part of the "we" and distinguish themselves from the "they." Gill (1986) adds that a group must be larger than two people but small enough to allow interaction, and have some continuity over time. Carron and Hausenblas's (1998) definition, along with Gill's (1986), provide the bare bones of what makes a group or team. In essence, when there is a group, there is an awareness and concern for the group as an entity and for the other group members.

Group operation. Group operation is a complex process or dynamic that consists of several individuals with varying relationships to each other, interacting in different ways, over changing times and various environmental conditions (Gill, 1986). In her review, Gill (1986) discusses five studies that have been instrumental in sport psychology's understanding of groups (Steiner, 1972; Ringleman as cited in Latane, Williams, & Harkins, 1979; Ingham, Levinger, Graves, & Peckham, 1974; Latane, Williams, & Harkins, 1979; & Williams, Harkins, & Latane, 1981). What follows is a review of these studies.

According to Steiner's model of group performance (1972, see Figure 1), actual productivity equals potential productivity minus losses due to faulty process. Potential productivity is the group's best possible performance given its resources and task demands. Resources include relevant knowledge and skill of the individual members, with individual ability being the most important resource for groups. Task demands are the requirements for performing the task. The task demands determine what resources are most useful. For instance, being tall is a valuable resource for a basketball player but

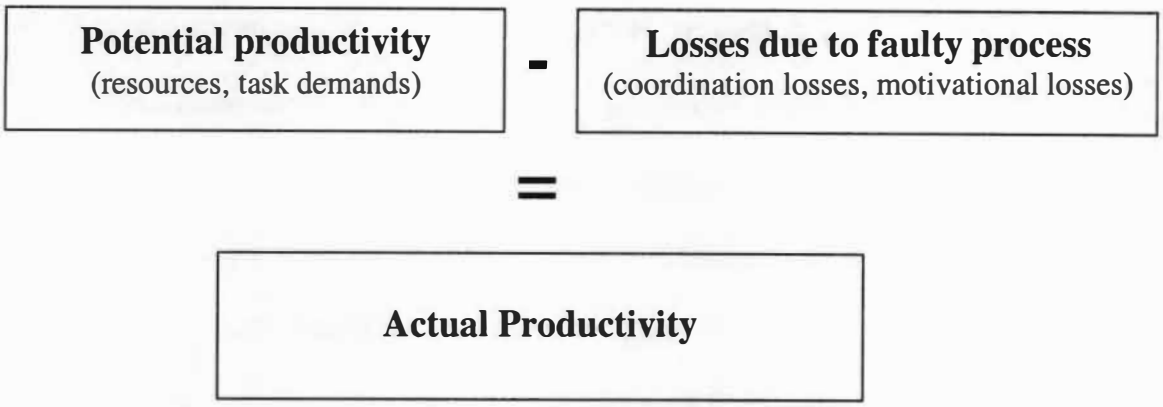

Figure 1. Steiner's model of group performance. Source: Adapted from Steiner, 1972.

detrimental to a jockey. The process involves putting the resources together for performance.

Faulty process includes: (a) coordination losses, which are mistimings, poor strategies, or ineffective communication, and (b) motivational losses, which occur when group members don't give their best effort. Therefore, in Steiner's (1972) model, the main role of the coach is to reduce process losses by creating and implementing organizational strategies that reduce coordination losses and motivational losses (Gill, 1986). Process losses vary amongst different sports. For instance, timing with group members is more important for volleyball compared to swimming, which focuses more on motivational losses. Also, in evaluating athletes, a coach may want to consider how an athlete affects the coordination and motivation of the team as well as his or her physical ability.

Another important phenomenon in the operation of groups is the Ringleman effect (as cited in Latane, Williams, & Harkins, 1979). About one hundred years ago, the German psychologist Ringleman conducted an unpublished study of individual force in group rope pulling. He found that groups pulled more than an individual but not with the force that was predicted by the individuals' additive score. When there was a group of two, their average force was only 93% of their average individual pull. In a group of three, the average force dropped to 85% of their average individual pull, and when there was an eight-man group pulling together, they only pulled with 49% of their average individual pull. Therefore, the Ringleman effect describes the significant negative relationship of increasing group size and decreasing individual performance (Latane et al., 1979).

In a 1974 study, Ingham, Levinger, Graves, and Peckman conducted a rope pulling experiment to determine whether the Ringleman effect was due to coordination losses or motivation losses. The subjects were blindfolded and told that they were pulling along with one to six people, when in reality, they had confederates only pretending to pull. The results again revealed the Ringleman effect; since the coordination aspect of the pulling was nullified, they concluded that motivational loss was the cause of the effect. This loss of motivation by individuals because of the social presence of others was later termed "social loafing" by Latane, Williams, and Harkins (1979).

An experiment designed to eliminate social loafing was subsequently conducted by Williams, Harkins, and Latane (1981). Participants were asked to clap and shout

either alone or in groups of two and six while wearing blindfolds and headsets. When participants were told that their individual outputs in the group cheer were being identified, they cheered louder, very close to the level they cheered alone. Williams and his colleagues suggest that being identifiable was significant to the participants because they were guaranteed contingency between their effort and the outcome; whether receiving credit for successful performance or blame for negative performance, they were largely in control of their outcome. Interestingly, after the experiment, the participants reported on a questionnaire that they cheered just as loud in the group as when they were alone. This suggests that social loafing is not a conscious phenomenon (Williams et al., 1981).

Furthermore, Latane, Williams, and Harkins (1980) found that identifying athletes may do more than just prevent social loafing, it may enhance performance in a group setting. The researchers asked collegiate swimmers to compete in both individual and relay races. Identifiability was manipulated by announcing or not announcing individuals' lap times over a loud speaker. In the low-identifiability condition, athletes swam faster in individual races than they did in relay races. However, under high-identifiability conditions, the athletes' relay times were faster than their individual times. This performance improvement due to the positive influence of a team was labeled "social striving" by Kerr and Brunn (1981, as cited in LeUnes & Nation, 2002). Social striving occurs when the factors of task relevance, intergroup competitiveness, partner effort, and personal involvement are present (LeUnes & Nation, 2002).

Stages of group development. In 1965, Tuckman reviewed 50 articles dealing with the stages of small group development over time in therapy groups, human relations training groups, and laboratory task groups (Tuckman, 1965). Tuckman developed a model of small group evolution that has been widely endorsed, particularly as it pertains to sport teams (see Cox, 1994; Weinberg & Gould, 1999). According to the Tuckman (1965) model, small groups progress through four stages: forming, storming, norming and performing.

In the *forming stage* (Tuckman, 1965), group members become oriented to each other and the task they are trying to accomplish. Members test the boundaries of interpersonal and task behavior. They try to determine their position and relationship with the other members, as well as define the task and the approach to achieving the task. Dependency relationships with the leaders, other group members, and preexisting standards occur.

The second stage, *storming* (Tuckman, 1965), is characterized by conflict. Emotions and friction between members increase. Members may become resistant to other members and the task. They compete to establish their place in the hierarchy. Defensiveness, jealousy, and anxiety are typical. Cliques may develop and there may be attempts to usurp the leaders. Members may argue, break rules and become recalcitrant.

In the third stage, *norming* (Tuckman, 1965), resistance is overcome. Members resolve their polarization and a sense of unity is established. They cooperate and provide emotional support. Although emotions are still high, members now contribute to the task. Finally, new standards of behavior and new roles of the members are adopted.

Performing is the last stage in Tuckman's (1965) model of small group development. Structural issues have been resolved and the structure can now be used functionally to optimize task performance. The norms and roles are now strong but flexible. The task achievement becomes paramount and task productivity is at its height.

However, Jansen (1999) states that the performing stage is not guaranteed for each team. Furthermore, he suggests that teams do not necessarily go sequentially through the stages; they may go back and forth between stages over time. Finally, the length of time teams spend in each stage varies (Tuckman, 1965). Again, the group or team process is complex and dynamic.

Cohesion

Cohesion is one of the most important variables in dealing with groups, particularly sport groups (Paskevich, Estabrooks, Brawley & Carron, 2001). In a national survey of coaches, Silva (1982, as cited in LeUnes & Nation, 2002) found that creating and maintaining cohesion was the most common concern. Indeed, cohesion is a complex concept that deserves attention if one is interested in understanding group performance. What follows is: (1) the definition of cohesion; (2) how it may be measured; (3) why it is important; (4) why it may be confusing; and (5) its correlates.

Definition of cohesion. Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) provide the classic definition of cohesion that sport psychology has built upon (see Carron, 1982; Carron & Dennis, 2001; Weinberg & Gould, 1999). According to Festinger et al. (1950), cohesion is, "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group" (p.164). They propose that two forces act on members to stay in the group: attractiveness of the group

and means control. The *attractiveness of the group* is how satisfying being in the group is for the members in and of itself. For instance, one may want to stay in a particular group because of the positive relationships with other members. On the other hand, *means control* is how the group helps the members reach goals that can only be achieved by being in that group. For instance, one may wish to stay in a group because certain social parties are accessible to members of that group. Therefore, while Festinger et al. (1950) define cohesion unidimensionally as attraction to the group, they consider the forces that cause cohesion to be bidimensional, including attraction and striving for certain goals (Carron, 1982).

Today in sport psychology, cohesion is usually defined by using a bidimensional perspective, considering the social bond within the group as one dimension, and the group goals as the other dimension (Carron, 1982). The reasons that contribute to the development of the group become integral to its nature. Every group has a goal or task, even when the group exists for purely social reasons. For example, a social group's goal may be to maintain or build friendship (Carron & Dennis, 2001). Furthermore, group cohesion is not a stable trait, but evolves along with the experiences of the group (Carron & Dennis, 2001). Finally, cohesion is associated with positive affect. Therefore, an updated definition provided by Carron, Brawley and Widmeyer (1998) states that cohesion is "a dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs" (p. 213).

Measurement of cohesion. A popular measurement of cohesion is the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ), developed by Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer (1985). The perceptions of the individual members of a team are categorized into two dimensions (see Figure 2). The first category, *group integration*, represents each member's perceptions of the group as a whole unit. The second category, *individual attractions to the group*, represents each member's attraction to the group. Each of these categories is then divided into task and social components. The respondents complete the questionnaire by rating on a numbered continuum from one to nine how much they disagree or agree with certain statements involving the different categories of cohesion. An example of a group integration-task statement is, "Our team is united in trying to reach its goals for performance." An example of a group integration-social statement is, "Our team would like to spend time together in the off season." An example showing individual attraction to the group-task is, "I am happy with my team's level of desire to

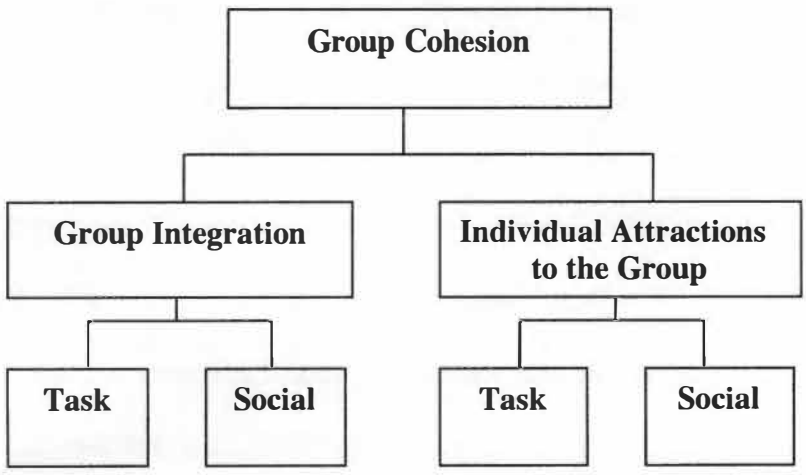

Figure 2. Conceptual model for the GEQ. Source: Carron & Dennis, 2001.

win," and an example of individual attraction to group-social is, "Some of my best friends are on this team" (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1985).

Importance of cohesion. A recent review of 30 sport psychology studies indicate that cohesion had a positive relationship with performance, with team cohesion being positively related to team success (83% of the studies; Widmeyer, Carron, & Brawley, 1993). For example, Ball and Carron (1976) found that members of cohesive collegiate ice hockey teams exerted more effort toward attaining the group's goals than did less cohesive teams. Also, Carron, Widmeyer & Brawley (1988) found that collegiate track, swimming, volleyball, hockey, basketball, and badminton teams, which perceived they had a high level of cohesion, had fewer dropouts, less absenteeism, and more punctuality than those on low level cohesive teams.

Ambiguity of cohesion. However, it should be noted that there has been some confusion about cohesion's effect. The ambiguity may be due to the measurement of cohesion and the direction of the causality (Weinberg & Gould, 1999). The measurement of cohesion may show a negative correlation between cohesion and performance if a study considers cohesion as only social attraction and does not consider the task element. For instance, Lenk (1977) analyzed the 1960 Olympic champion rowing team from Germany over a period of two years and found the team's performance increased and paralleled the intensity of the conflicts during the year. There were leadership disputes and cliques that formed but the team succeeded regardless. Lenk suggests that because members all had the same goal of achievement and their individual success was completely dependent on the team's success, they were able to perform well together.

Therefore, this study shows that task cohesion and social cohesion need to be differentiated when relating cohesion to performance.

Also, the stage of development that a team is in greatly mediates cohesion measurement (Cox, 1994). For instance, during the forming and the storming stage (Tuckman, 1965), team member are still getting oriented and working through issues. In the norming and performing stages (Tuckman, 1965), relationships and behaviors are more firmly established. Therefore, measuring a team's cohesion early in the season might not be a reliable portrayal of that team's cohesion (Cox, 1994). Finally, the direction of causality may be misleading. It may be difficult to establish whether cohesive teams perform well because they are cohesive, or they are cohesive because they perform well (Weiner & Gould, 1999).

Correlates of cohesion. Developing cohesion may also be confusing because there are several factors to consider. Carron (1982; see Figure 3) organized the numerous correlates of cohesion for sport teams into a conceptual model. Four categories of factors were constructed: environmental, personal, leadership, and team. Carron put these categories in particular order from the least important and least specific to the most important and most specific. What follows are descriptions of the correlates given by Carron (1982), and updated by Carron and Dennis (2001).

According to Carron (1982), *environmental factors* have the least determining influence on competing teams. One of the environmental components is contractual responsibility, which refers to the obligations and rules that the team members must

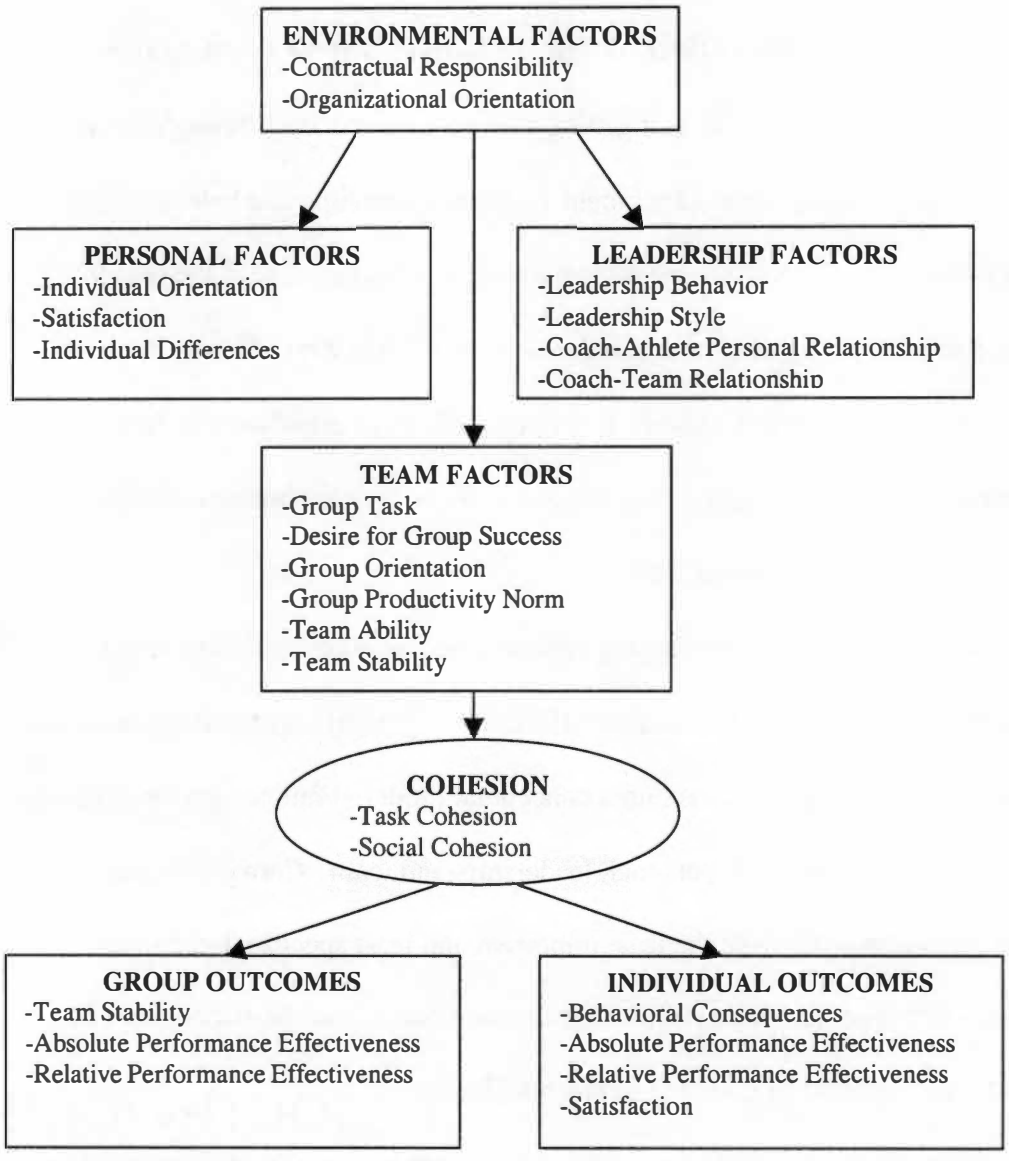

Figure 3. Conceptual model of cohesion in sport teams. Source: Carron, 1982.

compete under. For instance, a player may be limited to the number of contests s/he may compete in as an NCAA athlete. Another aspect of environmental factors is the organizational orientation. Different organizations have different goals and strategies based on the age, sex, and maturity of members. Therefore, a professional baseball league may emphasize task cohesion while a little league team may emphasize social cohesion. Carron and Dennis (2001) add proximity to the environmental factors. For instance, riding in a bus to competitions and sharing a locker room together usually increases team cohesion. They also add distinctiveness, which involves being separated from the general population, and team size, with too large or too small a group being detrimental to cohesion.

Personal factors are another component of Carron's (1982) model. Individual orientation is the first factor in this category, and refers to whether the individual members are more socially-motivated or task-motivated. The satisfaction of each member is the next component and suggests that if the members are satisfied with the performance, they will become more cohesive. Third are individual differences. Members who differ according to sex, socioeconomic status, race, and religion are more susceptible to forming cliques and having less team cohesion. Carron and Dennis (2001) suggest that cohesion is significantly influenced by similarities in attitudes about factors such as commitment, performance goals, codes of conduct for practice, games, and outside competition.

The third category of cohesion correlates in the Carron (1982) model is *leadership.* Leadership behavior and leadership style are two factors in this category.

Having a democratic style of leadership in decision-making usually builds more group cohesion than does an autocratic style (Carron & Dennis, 2001). The leader may disclose reactions about what is going on in the group. This may equalize the power relationship, increase the leader's sense of realness, and increase universality, which should increase cohesion (Corey & Corey, 2001). Finally, the coach-athlete and coach-team relationship affects cohesion. If the relationships are good, the coach is considered to be another member of the group, albeit with more authority.

The most specific and determining category of mediators for cohesion is *team factors.* The degree of task and social motivation for the group is a factor called group orientation. Another factor is the norm of productivity. Those groups with higher norms of behaving in a certain way have more cohesion. For instance, team members who all exert a high level of effort in practice will more likely be cohesive than team members who do not all try hard in practice.

Team stability is a third team factor. The longer a team stays together, the greater chance they will develop task and social cohesion. The desire for group success is a factor that Carron (1982) also suggests builds cohesion in that the more a group wants to perform well, the more likely it will be cohesive. Also, increased team ability usually increases cohesion.

Carron and Dennis (2001) later add the influence of member roles to the model. The degree of role clarity, role acceptance, and role performance for the team members mediates cohesion. They also add group goals and rewards, emphasizing that the goals of the group and the rewards they offer may boost cohesion. Lastly, they add

communication, in that the more task and social issues are discussed, the greater cohesion will be.

Motivation

Another important team construct is motivation. Motivation may be defined as the internal and external forces that incite the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001). It is best understood from an interactional perspective, which considers how personal and situational factors both impact behavior. That is, motivation is not solely based on one's traits like personality, needs, or goals, nor is it based solely on situational factors such as the coach's leadership style, the win-loss record of the team, or the training environment (Weinberg & Gould, 1999). This interaction was illustrated in a study by Sorrentino and Sheppard (1978) who found that approval-oriented swimmers swam faster on relay teams than in individual races. In contrast, rejection-threatened swimmers had slower times on relays compared to their individual races. The researchers suggest this occurred because athletes with the trait of approval-orientation felt there was a positive source of affiliation in the group situation if they succeeded. Therefore, their motivation increased because of the group incentives. On the other hand, the athletes with a rejection-threatened orientation feared negative affiliation in the group situation, which led to a decrease in motivation and performance.

Motivational thoughts shown to be most critical in the sport psychology literature are those concerning competence and control (Duda & Treasure, 2001). The following three theoretical approaches have been proposed to explain athlete and team motivation

while incorporating the factors of competence and control: (a) self-efficacy/collective efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1990); (b) intrinsic/extrinsic motivation (Deci, 1972); and (c) achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1989).

Self-efficacy/collective efficacy. Psychologist Albert Bandura (1977) created the concept of self-efficacy to describe one's perception of his or her capacity to successfully perform a specific task. As Bandura and colleagues posit (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996), unless one believes that his or her actions will produce the desired effect, there will be no impetus to try. Thus, athletes with high self-efficacy are more likely to exert a higher level of effort for a longer period of time, will choose more challenging tasks, feel less anxiety, experience more positive emotions and exhibit better performance than those with low self-efficacy (Duda & Treasure, 2001).

According to Bandura (1977), there are four principal ways to enhance self-efficacy: performance accomplishment, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (see Figure 4, as cited in Weinberg & Gould, 1999). The first and most important factor influencing self-efficacy is past performance, especially when the task was difficult but completed successfully. With repeated success, an occasional setback or failure will not destroy an individual's self-efficacy. However, if one has repeated failures, s/he will more likely experience lower expectations for future success. The second component, vicarious experiences, also boosts self-efficacy. Watching another perform a task successfully, especially if the other is similar to one's self, may help one learn and heighten his or her sense of competency. This effect is often called modeling. Third, verbal persuasion can raise one's self-efficacy. Coaches, teammates,

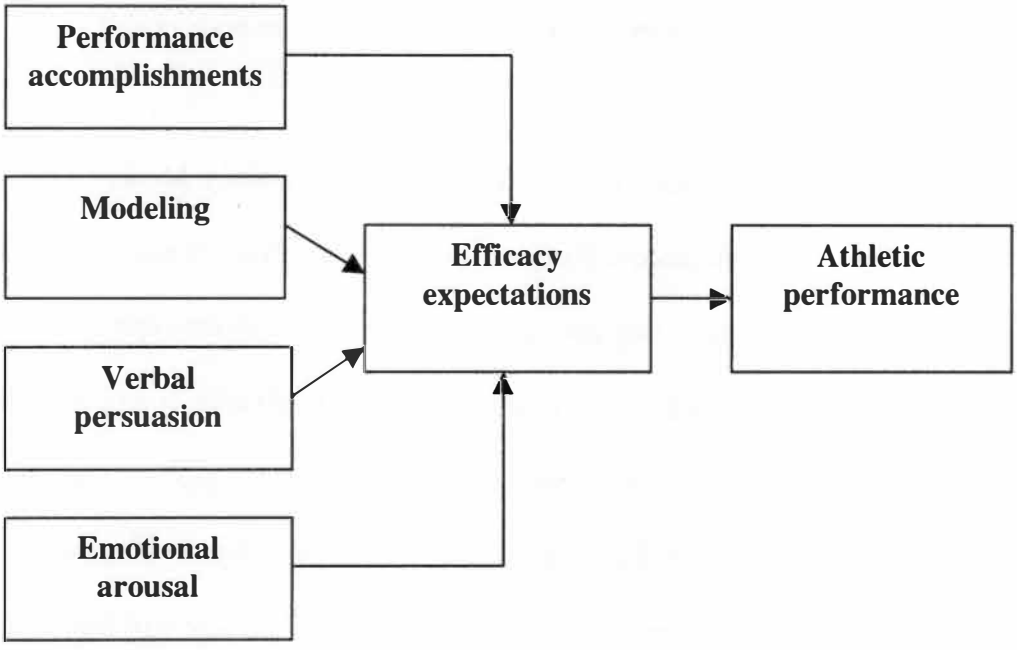

Figure 4. Bandura's (1977) model of self-efficacy. Source: Weinberg & Gould, 1999.

peers, family, and the athletes themselves may give feedback or motivational statements that increase self-efficacy. Verbal persuasion is particularly influential if it is received from someone believed to be credible and knowledgeable. Lastly, one may feel efficacious in a task if s/he positively appraises his or her physiological state. This includes positive self-assessments of arousal, sweating, heart rate, fear, pain, and fatigue. The key is the athlete's perception about how competent his or her body is able to perform the task.

Building on the four sources of self-efficacy given by Bandura, Maddux (1995) describes two other ways to enhance self-efficacy: through emotional states and imaginal experiences. In addition to appraising one's physiological state, one may appraise his or her *emotional state* and increase feelings of self-efficacy. For instance, if an athlete feels s/he is happy and believes that s/he plays well in this emotional state, self-efficacy will increase. Also, *imaginal experiences* can influence self-efficacy. Visualizing one's actions before performing may familiarize an individual with what s/he will face, making the task less daunting (Duda & Treasure, 2001).

Vealey (1996) uses the term sport confidence to describe self-efficacy for a specific sport. Vealey suggests seven additional sources of self-efficacy in sport: (1) mastery; (2) physical/mental preparation; (3) physical self-presentation; (4) social support; (5) coach's leadership; (6) environmental comfort; and (7) situational favorableness (see Table 1). First, *mastery* is improving one's personal skills or mastering skills. Second, feeling *physical/mental preparation* is feeling optimally prepared for the performance. Third, *physical self-presentation*, also known as body-

Table 1. **Sources of Sport Confidence.** Source: Vealey, 2001.

Source	Confidence derived from...
Mastery	-Mastering or improving personal skills.
Demonstration of ability	-Showing off skills to others or demonstrating more ability than one's opponent.
Physical/mental preparation	-Feeling physically and mentally prepared with an optimal focus for performance.
Physical self-presentation	-Perceptions of one's physical self (how one perceives one looks to others).
Social Support	-Perceiving support and encouragement from significant others in sport, such as coaches, family, and teammates.
Vicarious experience	-Watching others, such as teammates or friends, perform successfully.
Coach's leadership	-Believing coach is skilled in decision making and leadership.
Environmental comfort	-Feeling comfortable in a competitive environment.
Situational favorableness	-Feeling that the breaks of the situation are in one's favor.

image, is one's perception of how s/he looks to others physically. Fourth, *social support* may come from verbal persuasion of significant others such as teammates, coaches, and parents or may just be the perception of their support. Additionally, the *coach's leadership* is the how the individual perceives the coach's skills in decision-making and in leading. Next, *environmental comfort* is feeling comfortable in a particular site where the competition is to be held. Finally, *situational favorableness* is feeling that one has the breaks of the competition go his or her way or a sense of momentum when something fortunate occurs prompting an increase in the probability of future success. All seven of these factors could lead to an increase in athletes' self-efficacy in sports (Vealey, 2001).

However, individual members' self-efficacy alone does not account for a team's total motivation. The aggregate performance of a team is not merely the sum of individual efforts or feelings. Interactions and influences occur between team members. Therefore, Bandura created the term collective or team efficacy to refer to members' perceptions of group capabilities (Bandura, 1990). In a 1992 study, Hodges and Carron examined levels of collective efficacy and in-group muscular endurance performance tasks for male and female high school students. One group was told that they had superior strength based on their performance of a task (the high collective efficacy group) and another was told that they had inferior strength (low collective efficacy group). Both groups then competed separately against a confederate group in a contest to determine which group could hold a medicine ball on a platform for the longest time. The group with high collective efficacy was significantly more confident prior to the task, having stronger expectations for performance success. The experimenters manipulated the

medicine ball task so that both the experimental groups lost to the confederate group. Following this failure, the high collective efficacy group showed slight improvement in their performance while the low collective efficacy group showed a substantial decrease. Thus, the authors conclude that collective efficacy may influence positive expectations and resiliency following failure.

Intrinsic/extrinsic motivation. Another approach used to examine motivation in sport is the intrinsic/extrinsic model (Deci, 1972). Basically, intrinsically motivated individuals perform an activity for the inherent pleasure and satisfaction of the activity itself, whereas extrinsically motivated individuals engage in an activity as a means to an end (Deci, 1972). There are seven types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that lie along a continuum of how much personal control or self-determination one has in the participation (Vallerand & Rouseau, 2001; see figure 5). One end of the continuum is labeled amotivation, which refers to having relatively no motivation because the person has no sense of personal control for participating in the activity.

Next on the continuum are the four types of extrinsic motivation identified by Deci & Ryan (1985, as cited in Vallerand & Rouseau, 2001) as external regulation, introjection, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. *External regulation* involves no self-determination. One engages in an activity because of external rewards or external requirements. For instance, a football player may keep playing the sport collegiately to maintain a scholarship. A level above external regulation is *introjection*, where an individual feels pressure to participate, not from an external source but from self-imposed pressure like guilt or anxiety. For instance, a rower who refuses to miss a practice

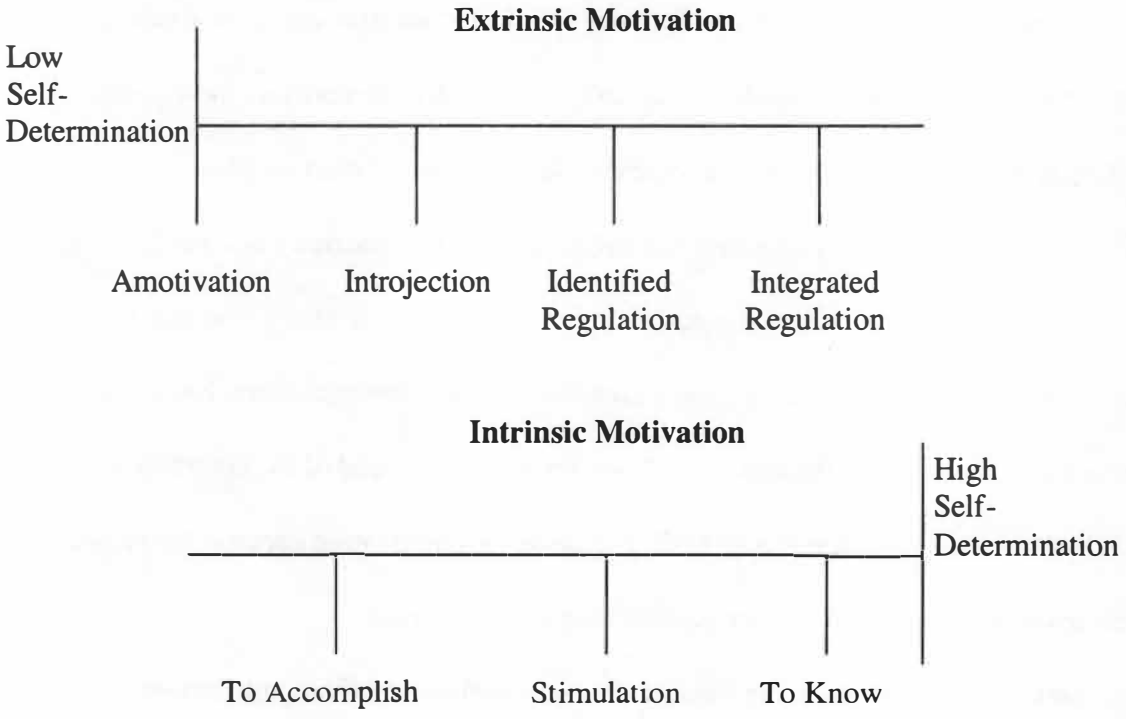

Figure 5. Self-determination continuum. Source: Adapted from Vallerand & Rouseau, 2001.

because of the ensuing feeling of guilt might be motivated by extrinsic introjection. The third type of extrinsic motivation is *identified regulation* and is the first type of extrinsic motivation that is based on free choice; however, participating in the activity is still considered a means to an end. The activity is not satisfying or enjoyable in itself. For instance, a wrestler may not enjoy weight training but does so to perform better in competition. The last type of extrinsic motivation is *integrated regulation*, which involves choosing to participate in an activity that may be enjoyable or satisfying but is primarily done for another purpose. For instance, a baseball player may enjoy staying home the night before a competition but his or her reason for doing so is to perform better in the next day's competition.

Next, there are three types of intrinsic motivation: to accomplish, for stimulation, and to know (Vallerand, Blais, Briere, & Peletier, 1989, as cited in Vallerand & Rouseau, 2001). Intrinsic motivation *to accomplish* involves seeking pleasure and satisfaction from the process of trying to achieve something. For instance, a swimmer may gain satisfaction in attempting to swim his or her fastest time. Second, intrinsic motivation for *stimulation* is when one participates in an activity to experience enjoyable sensations. For instance, a bicyclist may enjoy the feeling of the wind as well as the feeling of exertion. Finally, one may be intrinsically motivated *to know*, which is the process of learning, exploring or attempting to understand something new. For instance, an athlete may enjoy learning for the first time how to hit a z-serve in racquetball.

Vallerand and Rouseau (2001) suggest that an athlete may have a combination of these motivators. Furthermore, one's primary motivation may vary throughout training

and competition. For example, a distance runner may enjoy the process of competition for its own sake at the start of a cross country season, but may also feel internal pressure to train everyday and external pressure from teammates to be on time for each practice. Toward the end of the season, the athlete may feel more pressure and focus more on his or her place in the competition, and may enjoy the practices because of the pleasure of running sharper workouts outside in the cooler weather and changing season.

Motivation is not additive in that "the more the better," regardless of whether it is intrinsic or extrinsic (Weinberg, 1984). For instance, Weinberg (1984) reviewed three studies suggesting a greater amount of intrinsic motivation may be advantageous in certain situations (Deci, 1972; Deci, 1975; & Ryan, 1979). In a study by Deci (1972), participants were either offered one dollar for each of three puzzles completed or no monetary reward for solving the puzzles. The experimenters left the room for eight minutes and secretly observed the participants to see if they played with the puzzles in their free time. Magazines were also available. Those who received monetary rewards spent significantly less time playing with the puzzles compared to those who received no money for solving puzzles. Therefore, the extrinsic reward seemed to decrease participants' intrinsic motivation.

Deci (1975) explains how extrinsic motivation may affect intrinsic motivation with his cognitive evaluative theory. His theory suggests that intrinsically motivated behavior results from individual's innate need to feel competence and self-determination in his or her environment. Extrinsic rewards may enhance or undermine intrinsic motivation based on the controlling aspect or informing aspect of the reward. The

controlling aspect may be harmful if one feels that the rewards come from external sources rather than from one's own internal control. However, extrinsic rewards may be perceived by individuals as *informing* them of their competence, which would reinforce their self-determination.

The importance of athletes' perceptions of the controlling and informing aspects of extrinsic rewards was shown in a study examining the effect of athletic scholarships on male football players and wrestlers, and female athletes in six different sports (Ryan, 1979, as cited in Weinberg, 1984). The results revealed that football players receiving athletic scholarships had lower levels of intrinsic motivation than non-scholarship football players. However, the female athletes and male wrestlers on scholarship displayed more intrinsic motivation than did non-scholarship wrestlers and female athletes. Ryan suggests this was due to football players feeling that the scholarships were used as leverage by the coach to control them. Players often felt they had to perform well or they would risk losing their scholarship. On the other hand, wrestlers and female athletes perceived the scholarships as a source of information about their ability. Scholarships in their sports were a lot more rare compared to those in football, and, in their view, only offered to outstanding athletes.

All in all, it appears that intrinsically motivated athletes have a higher degree of motivation than do extrinsically motivated ones. They persist longer and with more effort, especially through adversity or poor performances (Duda & Treasure, 2001). Also, an intrinsically motivated individual is more likely to experience "flow," (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) which is the total immersion of oneself in an activity where one

is confident in his or her ability to perform a challenging task. This state has been associated with peak performance and optimal enjoyment. Kowal and Fortier (1999) studied 203 swimmers' experience of flow and found that swimmers who had the highest levels of intrinsic motivation during practice experienced the highest degree of flow.

Achievement goal theory. Achievement goal theory is the final major motivational paradigm reviewed in this study. This theory posits that the purposes underlying individuals' actions in achievement settings where there is evaluation, such as athletics, may be divided into two categories: ego orientation and task orientation (Nicholls, 1989). These two goal orientations are not mutually exclusive- individuals have a degree of both. Therefore, one may be high ego/low task, high task/low ego, high task/high ego, or low task/low ego oriented (Duda & Treasure, 2001).

A high *ego orientation* refers to a desire to enhance one's feelings of competence by demonstrating superiority relative to others, even if one is not directly competing against another or imagining specific others (e.g., taking an IQ test) (Nicholls, 1989). A person with a high ego orientation and high perceived ability will exert high effort if s/he feels that high effort is necessary to show that his or her capability is high. However, if one is high ego oriented and has low perceived ability, s/he may expect failure on moderately difficult tasks and avoid them or choose the very hard or very easy tasks to hide his or her inability. This is because if one fails on the very hard task, it will be expected by others. Moreover, achieving on the easy task does not threaten the person's level of competence. Also, a person with high ego orientation may try to succeed while exerting the least amount of effort so that if s/he fails, it will not be due to his or her

inferior ability but to his or her lack of effort. This is because s/he may feel that ability is fixed and the ultimate measure of his or her competency. What is most threatening to a high ego orientated individual is trying his or her maximum in a moderately challenging task and failing (Duda & Hall, 2001).

On the other hand, an individual who is *task oriented* is less competitive with others and more competitive with self (Nicholls, 1989). S/he may be motivated to learn, to perform the task for its own satisfaction, to try hard, for self-improvement, or for mastery. Ability as capability is irrelevant; effort is considered paramount.

Therefore, high ego orientation may correspond with positive achievement if one is confident in one's (high) ability. As Duda and Treasure (2001) claim, a high task/ high ego orientation may be optimal if one has multiple sources of perceiving one's self as competent. That is, one may have the option to focus on different goals- task or ego- at different times throughout the training and competition process.

However, the majority of the sport psychology literature promotes a task orientation. For instance, Hall, Kerr and Matthew (1998) found that male and female high school cross country runners with a high ego orientation had greater cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and more doubts about their actions than did athletes with a high task orientation. In addition, Duda (1988) found that with male and female undergraduate recreational sport participants, those with a high task orientation (in terms of mastery) were more likely to participate in sports longer and practice more in their free time than participants with a high ego orientation.

Existential-Phenomenology

In order to collect the richest descriptions of the championship team experience from the coaches' perspectives, the research method selected for the present study was existential-phenomenology (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). To date, only a few existential-phenomenological studies have been conducted in sport psychology (e.g., Dale, 1996, 2000). What follows is a description of existential-phenomenology and how it may be used to effectively examine the experience of individuals.

Existential-phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that combines the two philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is considered the founder of existentialism, while Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is credited with theoretically framing phenomenology (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Existentialism's fundamental doctrine is that each human has a unique way of experiencing his or her world (Polkinghorne, 1989); however there are universal, underlying themes that each individual struggles with (Valle et al., 1989), such as finding purpose, confronting freedom and responsibility in making choices, and examining relationships with others (Hein & Austin, 2001). Phenomenology adopts existentialism's perspective on human existence and provides the method of investigating particular experiences of existence through rigorous and thorough first-person descriptions (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). What follows are explanations of the interrelated tenets of existential-phenomenology that are especially germane to this study: (1) essences; (2) bracketing; (3) being-in-the world; and (4) intentionality.

Essences. In existential-phenomenology, it is assumed that humans have a unique capacity to know and understand essences, or fundamental structures of phenomena, through introspection of experiences in the world (Patton, 1990). However, what is known is often hidden. Ihde (1986) provided the following analogy of hidden essences. Two blind Indian men approach an elephant. The first Indian feels the trunk and exclaims, "It is like a snake- long and windy." The second Indian feels the leg and concludes, "It is like a tree trunk- rough and strong." It is obvious that both blind Indians are not describing well the essence of what they are experiencing. The descriptions are not thorough enough and they are based on simile and traditional beliefs rather than a careful analysis of the phenomenon standing before them. They are not, as Husserl stressed, getting to the things themselves (1960, as cited in Ihde, 1986).

According to Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997), the best method of bringing essences to light is the existential-phenomenological dialogue where the experiencer is probed to describe as richly and clearly as possible his or her experience of a particular phenomenon. Pollio et al. (1997) describe the value of this dialogue:

> Unlike third-person procedure, which yields a psychology of solitary individuals, dialogic methods encourage the self and the other (the I and the You) to clarify for each other the meaning of their dialogue as it unfolds between them. Dialogue not only allows the speaker to describe experience; it also requires him or her to clarify its meaning to an involved other and, perhaps, even to realize it for the first time during the conversation itself (p. 29).

Thus, both the participant and the researcher collaborate to paint colorful "verbal portraits" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p.45) of the essences through dialogue. The researcher may help the participant become more aware of his or her perspective and may cultivate

the examination of the phenomenon from different angles, thereby, producing a more varied perspective (Idhe, 1986).

Bracketing. In order to carefully focus on the phenomenon as it appears to the participant, a bracketing of presuppositions must occur. The researcher must bracket, or put aside, "scientific, philosophical, cultural, and everyday assumptions" (Moran, 2000, p. 4) about the participant's experience. Previous knowledge is not negated but brought to awareness and, as much as possible, put in abeyance (Moran, 2000). Bracketing is accomplished by using: (a) a bracketing interview; (b) one open-ended question; (c) appropriate probes; (d) a research group; and (e) the participants' own words in the analysis.

In a bracketing interview before the study, the researcher is asked questions about the topic of study and then his or her responses are transcribed and analyzed (Dale, 1996). His or her presuppositions are exposed in order to minimize the influence they may have in leading the participant in the direction the researcher expects the participant to go based on his or her own presuppositions.

Focusing on one open-ended question is another method of suspending one's assumptions (Patton, 1990). An open-ended question captures the point of view of the participant without predetermining what that point of view should be. If the interviewer employs a questionnaire arranged by specific categories, it largely molds the participant's perspective instead of allowing the participant's perspective to emerge. It assumes that all the participants have the same figural topics in their experience when this may not be

the case. In the existential-phenomenological interview, what is figural for each participant emerges from the dialogue (Dale, 1996).

Furthermore, if a researcher uses a long list of questions, the participant may pick up on the sense of getting through the questions and cooperate by giving brief, superficial answers (Shank, 2002)- the antithesis of an existential-phenomenological interview. Or, the participant may sense that the researcher is more interested in asking the questions rather than hearing the participant's responses, and may withdraw psychologically (Shank, 2002).

After the researcher asks the main open-ended question, s/he continues bracketing by using appropriate probes (Dale, 1996). First, the probes should follow naturally from the discussion and not be based on the researcher's desire to support a hypothesis. Second, they should be used for elucidation of an ambiguous statement or for a more in-depth description, not to obtain explanations. The researcher focuses on gathering descriptions of *what* the phenomenon was, not *why* the phenomenon occurred. Finally, probes should be phrased, using the participant's own words as much as possible. Examples of probes might be: "You said...could you say a little more about that? What do you mean by ...? You said...could you explain that more? Could you please describe what...was like?" (Dale, 1996).

Bracketing in the analysis of the themes that emerge is also important in existential-phenomenology. Two methods of bracketing in the analysis of themes are by using the interpretations of a research group and using the participant's own words (Dale, 1996). After the researcher has read the transcripts, s/he chooses members to form a

research group. These members should have training in the method. Next, the research group reads one or more of the transcripts and discusses the meaning and essences they see in order to expand the researcher's perspective. As a result, the research group may pick up a particular aspect of the interview that the researcher did not see. In addition, in interpreting the data, the participant's language should be used as much as possible rather than the researcher's language. The words of the participant should stand on their own instead of the researcher trying to fit them into a predetermined theory or vernacular. In other words, the researcher should try to portray the experience with the most experience-near description (Dale, 1996).

Being-in-the world. Being-in-the world is a third important concept of existential-phenomenology that is relevant to this study. This phrase was coined by phenomenological philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) (1962, as cited in Polkinghorne, 1989) and identifies the most important link between phenomenology and existentialism. Instead of focusing on the universal essences of experience in general as Husserl did, Heidegger concentrated more on essences in particular contexts or situations (Polkinghorne, 1989). This focus corresponds to existentialism, which posits that there is no such thing as a natural man or natural woman- a person does not exist apart from the world (Valle et al., 1989). We cannot talk about human experience without talking about the world in which it occurs; the context is essential to bear in mind. For instance, imagine an individual's whole understanding of children being based on a photograph of three children playing at the beach. The individual has the choice of deciding what is figural about these children, focusing on their splashing in the water or focusing on their

excited faces. However, s/he is given the context of what s/he may be conscious of (the beach); this will greatly determine the meaning of children to him or her.

Intentionality. The other facet of being-in-the world states that the world does not exist, as humans know it, unless we perceive it and make meaning out of it (Valle et al., 1989). This facet goes along with the fourth existential-phenomenological concept of intentionality. Polkinghorne (1989) describes consciousness as an active process, not a mechanical absorption of sensory data. Objects appear as something; they have meaning. A car or bicycle appears as an essence, not as a configuration of metal. These objects can be material like the bicycle, imaginary like a dream, conceptual like equity, or be about emotions, thoughts, or desires (Hein & Austin, 2001). Even if we think we are not conscious of anything, we are in fact conscious of lacking consciousness. This concept of conscious being pointed toward something is intentionality (Hein & Austin, 2001). Humans mediate their experiences by making meaning of them. We are not merely stimulus-response, but rather stimulus-organism-response, beings (Bugental, 1989). The world has the meaning we create. The goal of existential-phenomenology is to examine the perceptions of participants and to get at the meaning they make of certain phenomena. It is not taken for granted that a phenomenon has the same meaning for different individuals.

Summary

In this chapter, sport psychology literature was reviewed and related concepts discussed in order to provide readers with a better understanding of the experience of competitive sport teams, including the group process, cohesion, and motivation.

Existential-phenomenology was also described because this paradigm governed the interviews and analysis of the interviews conducted in this study.

In the next chapter, the methodology for this study is described. This includes: (a) how the researcher's background led to the topic of study; (b) a description of the participants; and (c) how the interviews were conducted and the data was analyzed.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine championship cross country coaches' experience of their most successful teams. Included in this chapter are: (a) a statement of the researcher as an instrument; (b) a description of the participants; and (c) the procedures of data collection and analysis.

Researcher as an instrument

In an existential-phenomenological investigation, the researcher cannot be separated from the study (Appleby, 2000; Patton, 1990). S/he plays a critical role in what is revealed in the data collection and interpretation. Therefore, the researcher is seen as an instrument of the study. The researcher chooses to examine a topic based on his or her history (Dale, 1994). Bringing this history to awareness helps the researcher avoid biases and gives the reader a better understanding of the researcher's interest in the study. Following is a brief description of my history that influenced the focus of this study, NCAA Division III National Championship Cross Country teams and their coaches.

I started participating in organized sports when I was eight years old. In elementary and junior high school, I played baseball, basketball, and football. I was also fascinated with Chicago's professional teams. When the Cubs (1984 and 1989), the Bears (1985), and the Bulls (the early 1990s) won championships, I felt an affiliated sense of joy and tried to capture their seasons by saving newspaper articles and trading cards.

In junior high school, I joined the cross country and track teams, and in seventh grade, I decided that I wanted to be a cross country coach (while still harboring hopes of replacing Don Mattingly at first base for the Yankees). In high school, I stopped playing other organized sports to concentrate on running. I was never on a conference or state championship team, but our teams were better than most in the state. We competed against York High School, which, under coach Joe Newton, had won twenty Illinois State Cross Country championships. I was in awe of their teams and read over and over the book, *Running to the Top of the Mountain* (Newton & Durkin, 1988) which described their program and included brilliant photos of their experience.

In college, I ran for a nationally ranked Division I cross country program in North Carolina for two years. Over one winter break there, I traveled to Kenya to live and train with teams of the best distance runners in the world. Their group support, dedication, and confidence were definitely inspirational. I then transferred to a Division III school in Illinois to experience a championship team, learn about coaching, and fulfill my potential as a runner. There, I was fortunate to run on two National Championship cross country teams and two National Championship track teams.

Currently, I am a sport psychology masters degree student, a volunteer assistant coach for the cross country and Division I National Championship track teams at the school I'm attending, and a competitive runner. This study was born of a passion for the championship team experience, an interest in learning about successful coaches, and an interest in examining the characteristics of successful teams. Being familiar with these

NCAA Division III Cross Country National Championship coaches, I recognized that they had a wealth of wisdom to tap.

As Patton (1990) suggests, understanding is accomplished by trying to put oneself in the other person's perspective, by trying to discover their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This is best achieved through empathy and closeness to the people and situations being examined. My relative closeness to these coaches' experiences hopefully enhanced what this study brought to light. As Patton (1990) states:

> It is useful to remember that many contributions to our understanding of the world have come from scientists' personal experiences. One finds many instances when closeness to sources of data made key insights possible- Piaget's closeness to his children, Freud's proximity to and empathy with his patients, Darwin's closeness to nature, and even Newton's intimate encounter with an apple (p. 48).

Participants

There were six participants involved in this study (three women's coaches and three men's coaches). Two of the women's coaches were female and one was male, while the three men's coaches were male. All were head coaches who had coached at least their second NCAA Division III National Championship Cross Country team within the last ten years. These particular coaches were chosen because: (a) I assumed that winning at least two championships is a sign of coaching excellence; (b) they had won championships relatively recently; (c) I knew of them and respected them; and (d) they were accessible for interviewing.

In this section I briefly describe the participants individually before examining them as a group. A summary of the participants is provided in Table 2. The reader

should gain a better understanding of each coach's perspective and experience by knowing a little of the coach's background.

Three of the participants in this study chose pseudonyms and three did not have a preference, so I created pseudonyms for them. Pseudonyms were given to protect participants' identity and also to provide the reader with names to better associate with the quotes.

Anne Marie. Anne Marie has coached women's cross country at her current college for the last 16 years. She is an alumnus of the college she coaches, where as a student she played softball and volleyball. Anne Marie went on to earn a masters and an Ed.D. degree in exercise physiology. She also has experience coaching collegiate swimming and tennis. When she began coaching cross country at her current college, there were only four runners on the team. Through a systematic plan, she has molded an outstanding Division III cross country program.

In addition to her coaching duties, Anne Marie is the women's athletic director and also teaches a lecture class in exercise physiology and an occasional physical education activity class. During the week, she spends about two hours a day in coaching-related activities, but on weekend travel days, she typically spends about 10-12 hours. She does not coach track in the spring like most collegiate coaches. According to Anne Marie, this system works because the track coach has a similar training philosophy. Also, Anne Marie's assistant cross country coach is the assistant track coach and is responsible for about 90% of the recruiting. Therefore, as she says, "It's a nice carryover."

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Participant	Anne Marie	Arthur	Elaine	Eric	Sam	Will	Mean
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male	
Gender Coached	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	
Age When Coached Most Successful Team	43 yrs.	59 yrs.	42 yrs.	44 yrs.	51 yrs.	36 yrs.	45.83 yrs.
Education	Ed.D.	Ph.D.	M.S.	M.A.	M.S.	M.S.	
Years Coaching Cross Country	16	40	21	23	38	25	27.17
Years Coaching at Current School Before First National Championship Team	13	4	7	16	10	7	9.5
Years Coaching at Current School Before Most Successful Team	14	7	9	17	18	8	12.17
Collegiate Cross Country Experience	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	
Post-Collegiate Running Experience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Married, years	Yes, 15	Yes, 16	Yes, 20	Yes, 12	Yes, 15	Yes, 20	16.33
Children	2	2	0	0	5	0	1.5
Other Professional Responsibilities	Ath. Dir., Teacher	Teacher, Research	Acad. Advisor	Teacher	Teacher, Acad. Ad	Acad. Ad.	
Hours Spent on Coaching-Related Activities on Non-Meet Days	2	5	7-8	12	12	5	7.25

Anne Marie is an expressively spiritual person and this fits well with the atmosphere of her college. She has been married for 15 years and has two children.

Arthur. Sport has taken Arthur all over the country and all over the world. In college, Arthur was a swimmer and rifle shooter. After college, he served in the Army. He became a pentathlete and was a two-time Olympian in this competition of fencing, swimming, shooting, running, and horseback riding. Arthur started running to train for the event and after his pentathlon career, ran a few marathons. He has coached running at the collegiate or post-collegiate elite level for 40 years at several sites around the world. Along the way, he earned a masters and Ph.D. degree in exercise physiology.

Arthur has coached at his current college for the last 16 years. In addition to coaching, he teaches exercise physiology and physical education activity classes. He also is involved in a great amount of research for which the school does not pay him. He estimates that he spends about five hours a day on coaching-related activities and says, "I'd spend more time if I had more...I've always wanted to just be a coach."

Arthur has been married for 16 years and has two children. He has an impressive talent for remembering athletes' times and places in races. He is very curious and analytical about human sport performance.

Elaine. To use her words, Elaine exudes "great passion" for coaching, especially the competitive and goal achievement aspect of the sport. As she declares, "I love to compete. I would just as soon turn any game into a competition. You learn a lot by winning and by losing. Sport gives you your greatest joys and your greatest frustration."

Elaine grew up in the state in which she is coaching. According to Elaine, she has been around sport her whole life and was particularly involved in swimming as a youth. Unfortunately, her sport choices as a woman were limited in high school and college, so she did not get an opportunity to run cross country. However, she did run track for five weeks in high school and for four years in college. She also participated in swimming and gymnastics in college.

She began coaching age group swimming and then track in graduate school. She earned a masters degree in exercise physiology and went on to initiate the women's cross country program at her current college 21 years ago. Presently, Elaine is also an academic advisor and estimates that she spends about 7-8 hours a day in coaching-related activities. She has a husband of 20 years.

Eric. Like Anne Marie, Eric is also coaching his alma mater's cross country team. He ran four years of high school cross country and four years of college cross country. He competed in running post-collegiately and has run about 30 marathons. He was living in another region of the country when high school kids he had coached in his college town urged him to coach them after their coach quit. As he said, "I packed up my bags and just came out there and started coaching for 600 dollars or whatever it was back then." Soon, he became a men's assistant coach at his current college and eventually stepped into the head coaching position. He has coached there for 23 years.

Eric earned a masters degree in physical education with a concentration in coaching. Interestingly, he said the counseling graduate classes were the most beneficial for coaching. According to Eric, he learned the value of listening to his athletes,

especially to their feelings, and allowing the athletes to find answers in asking their own questions.

Currently, Eric teaches physical education activity classes in addition to coaching. He usually spends about 12 hours a day in coaching-related activities. Eric is very insightful, especially when it pertains to the mental aspect of racing and training. He is definitely more of a teacher and guide than authoritarian. He has been married for 12 years.

Sam. Sam was a highly successful runner in high school and college. He has also been a highly successful coach for 36 years at his current college. He grew up and went to college in the same state he is currently coaching in. Sam earned a masters degree in physical education and was a graduate assistant coach at the college he ran for as an undergraduate. Currently, Sam is an academic advisor and physical education teacher in addition to being a coach. When asked how many hours a day he spends in coaching-related activities, he quipped, "Twenty-four." He then explained that it is hard not to think about coaching after leaving the work place, but, as he said, "I try to, believe me." He then estimated that he spends about 12 hours a day in coaching-related activities, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Sam is a playful person who used Socratic questions in the interview to have fun but also to get points across. For instance, to emphasize the importance of lifestyle in trusting teammates, he asked, "How many hours are there in the day?" I replied, "Twenty-four." He asked, "Alright, how many hours do you train?" "Three probably," I calculated. He next asked, "How many hours are left?" "Twenty-one," I answered. He

then asked the rhetorical question, "So do you think it's important what you do in the twenty-one hours or just the three?" Sam is very attuned to the emotional side of sport and life, emphasizing concepts like synergy, commitment, unselfishness, and emotional connection. He and his wife have been married for 15 years and have five children.

Will. Will has coached running at the junior high, high school or collegiate level for the past 26 years and has coached cross country at his current college for 20. He was raised, went to college, and went to graduate school in the state that he currently coaches in. In high school, Will was mainly a basketball player and also played golf. He ran one cross country and track season and had success. However, he did not feel he had the experience to run for his college's team. While in graduate school earning a masters degree in exercise physiology, he was an assistant cross country and track coach. Also, Will became more involved in his own running and became a very competitive marathoner and has run about 50 marathons.

Currently, in addition to coaching, Will is also an academic advisor. He calculates that he spends about five hours a day in coaching-related activities, not including the weekends.

Will is an animated storyteller whose gregariousness is evident. The following quote shows the enjoyable, comfortable relationship he has with his athletes, "Eddy, Wes, and Brad were the pranksters. If I had food in my office they would eat it…You know, they would go, 'I don't know where…' And they would be the ones that would be eating 'em!…But those were good guys to have because there would always be something funny." Will has been married for 20 years.

Participant summary. The aim of the participant descriptions and demographics was to give the reader a better feel for the coaches' backgrounds, personalities, and lives. As a whole, several characteristics of the coaches stood out. First, it was apparent that they all had an intrinsic love of coaching and the sport. None of the coaches seemed to be in the profession for the money. They all had other professional responsibilities and families but still put in regular workday hours in coaching-related activities (7.25), which did not include weekend travel or meet days when this number was usually higher. And although only two of the six coaches competed for collegiate cross country teams, they all ran races after college. Second, this sample of participants had a great deal of cross country coaching experience with an average of 27.17 years. Interestingly, it took several years for the coaches to win their first Cross Country National Championship (9.5) and even longer to coach their most successful National Championship team (12.17). Also, this group had a high level of education with each earning masters degrees and two earning doctoral degrees, all in a physical education-related fields. Finally, all but one of the coaches either went to the college that they are currently coaching at or were from the same state.

Procedure

Bracketing interview. Before interviewing the participants, I participated in a bracketing interview conducted by an experienced existential-phenomenological interviewer who had taken a research class in the method and had conducted existential-phenomenological research (see Pollio et al., 1997). Since I had the experience of being an athlete on NCAA Division III National Cross Country Championship teams instead of

the experience as a coach, I was asked in the bracketing interview, "What especially stands out to you about the most successful National Championship cross country team that you ran on?"

The interview was then transcribed and analyzed separately by both the bracketing interviewer and myself to identify the themes that characterized my experience. These themes represented my possible presuppositions of what the coaches would say in this study. The bracketing interviewer and I discussed the themes after we each analyzed the interview separately. I referred to the themes during this study in order to suspend my assumptions and to not lead the participants into discussions about the themes I expected to emerge (see Dale, 2000).

The bracketing interview revealed that I might have expected the following themes to emerge from the coaches' interviews about their most successful National Championship cross country team: experience, roles, connection with teammates and coach, a common goal, sacrifices, confidence, enjoyment, leadership, tradition, and sharing hard work.

Pilot study. Next, in order to become a more comfortable and skilled existential-phenomenological interviewer, I conducted a pilot study. I interviewed an NCAA Division I cross country coach and asked him to choose a successful team that he coached. I then asked, "What especially stands out to you about this team?" From this interview, I gained experience helping the participant feel comfortable, using appropriate probes that followed the dialogue, and organizing my notes during the interview (see

Pollio et al., 1997). More importantly, I gained confidence that the interviews would be valuable and that I would be a competent interviewer.

Participant interviews. Following the bracketing interview and pilot study, I contacted three of the possible participants by email, three in person, and one by telephone. I informed them about the main topic to be investigated and invited them to participate. All seven of the coaches agreed to participate and convenient times and places to conduct the interviews were scheduled. Also, I asked them to start thinking about the specific team they would be discussing. One of the possible participants had a conflict, so that interview was cancelled (6/7= 85% response rate).

Of the six interviews conducted, four were held at the participants' offices and two were held at the participants' hotels at the 2001 NCAA Division III National Cross Country Championships site, one before the race and one after. Before each interview, the participants were given a letter of information (see Appendix A) and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B).

The interview began with background questions about the participants (see Appendix C for the interview guide). These initial questions not only informed but functioned to build rapport and warm the coaches' minds up to the topic and the interview process (see Dale, 1994). Before asking the main question, I emphasized that the question was open-ended and they were free to describe any experiences that stood out to them. Then I asked: "What especially stands out to you about your most successful National Championship team?" The interviews proceeded in a spiraling fashion rather than as linear dialogues (see Dale, 1994). For example, at times, the participants were

probed about a concept they brought up a few minutes prior to the last topic they were discussing. This procedure was followed in order to avoid interruptions. The interviews were audiotaped and lasted between approximately forty-five minutes and two hours.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim and sent the participants an email attachment of their respective transcript. I asked them to read the transcript and to correct any errors, make any deletions or additions that they wished (see Pollio et al., 1997). I also asked them to create a pseudonym for themselves. No major revisions were made. However, two of the participants requested that a few sentences about athletes or fellow coaches be omitted. One participant asked for grammar errors to be corrected, and two participants clarified words that I had transcribed incorrectly.

Data analysis. After the participants returned their revised transcripts and pseudonyms to me, I analyzed the transcripts for themes. I read through the interviews several times to get a sense of the interviews as a whole and how they related to each other (see Pollio et al., 1997). I then made notes of themes that seemed to emerge. Examining a range of experiences from these six coaches allowed me to identify similarities between the participants.

Then, each interview was read aloud in research groups consisting of sport psychology graduate students and a sport psychology professor, all of whom were familiar with existential-phenomenology and had signed a confidentiality form (see Appendix D). While reading through the interviews, we stopped at certain points where themes seemed to emerge (see Pollio et al., 1997). The phrase or group of phrases that seemed to show a theme were then brought up and discussed further.

I then read through each of the transcripts and notes again to get a sense of each interview and the entire protocol as a whole (see Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Next, the themes and the phrase or group of phrases that showed these themes were written down. Themes that seemed connected within and across interviews were clustered. These larger clusters of related themes were the major themes of the interviews as a whole. The related themes were subthemes and grouped under the major theme they were most significant to, according to the participants' discourse (see Valle, King, & Halling, 1989).

This process of moving from the whole of each interview and the whole of all the interviews to specific parts in the texts and back to the whole is called the hermeneutic circle (Valle et al., 1989). This method is a thorough way of interpreting and understanding text. Using the hermeneutic circle is like reading a passage of a letter written by a friend (Valle et al., 1989). One must read the whole letter to get a clear understanding of the passage's meaning. Likewise, to come to a clear understanding of the letter, you need to read the passages individually.

In this study, I used the hermeneutic circle in two ways via the idiographic and nomothetic interpretation (see Idhe, 1986). Idiographic interpretation calls for the reader to view each interview as a case study. I attempted to understand each passage and the themes that emerged in relation to the whole text, and to understand the whole text by examining the passages and themes. According to Idhe (1986), describing experiences in narrative form often brings instant understanding of themes because it sets a concrete,

familiar context in which the themes can be understood. This is a similar method story tellers, myth makers, novelists, artists and poets use to express essences.

In nomethetic interpretation, each interview is related to all of the other interviews (Dale, 2000). The goal of this type of interpretation is not to arrive at generalizations for the experience, but rather to uncover of how participants' experiences resemble each other.

After I identified and clustered the themes, I then examined them with a research group in order to assure that I had matched the experience and words of the participants (see Pollio, et al., 1997). After this discussion, I constructed the final thematic structure of the coaches' experience of their most successful National Championship team. This thematic structure is shown and described in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine six cross country coaches' experience of NCAA Division III National Championship cross country teams using existential-phenomenological interviews. Four major themes emerged from these interviews: *attitude*, *cohesion*, *talent*, and *development*. These themes are interrelated and some of the coaches' quotes may fit into one or more of these themes. Therefore, themes should be viewed as a whole to best understand the experience of National Championship teams for these coaches (see Dale, 2000). Figure 6 depicts the coaches' experience of their teams in the shape of a square to show the experience as an entirety and to portray the major themes as united and related (see Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1997). The major themes are not connected by arrows to represent a sequence of steps to achieve the result of a championship team, but rather are represented by stars to signify that they are characteristics that stood out to the coaches about their most successful National Championship team. What follows is a discussion of each of the themes that emerged and a variety of the participants' quotes that revealed them. An outline of the major themes, subthemes, and condensed quotes summarizing the themes are shown in Table 3.

Theme One: Attitude

Attitude was the first major theme that emerged from the coaches' interviews. As Arthur exclaimed, "It's all attitude. When you have people who have that attitude,

Figure 6. Major themes in the coaches' experience of their most successful National Championship cross country team.

Table 3. Major Themes, Subthemes, and Summary Quotes

Summary Quotes	Subthemes	Major Theme
-Not the coach saying, 'We want this' -Didn't do the minimum, went over the max -Different guys have different heads -It's like having a kick	Self-Motivation	Attitude
-Up to the athlete's inner-fire -They'd kill themselves in competition -We had four different number one guys -Different people got to shine on different days -Got beaten up, exactly what we needed -Always fun, 'Who the heck are these guys' -Into beating people that beat them previously -'We got to win to stay even with the women' -Who could eat an ice cream cone the fastest	Competitiveness	
-All believed in hearts we were capable -We expected to win, figured supposed to win -Knew what it would take to win a championship -They raced with no fear -Running the course previously, felt comfortable -Very much trust in ability to perform well -Big part of peaking, confidence you are peaked -Having all those good people set standard -Gained by developing a team mind -My goal- get athletes to believe belong up top -'If don't believe, not happen by chance' -Underlying feeling could be best of the best	Confidence	
-Mom and Dad are still going to love you -Taking care of your own business -Gauging emotional energy over season -Staying calm, letting body do the work -Nothing was going to upset her -Run that and not get discouraged -Handle pressure, not back down -Runner biffed, ended up getting up there -Not, 'It's life or death if we won'	Emotional Control/ Perspective	

Table 3. (continued) Major Themes, Subthemes, and Summary Quotes

Summary Quotes	Subthemes	Major Theme
-Made pact-the commitment, sacrifices, goals -Whole season drawn towards that day -Vowed to make run at National title -I became a driver, driving the van -Wanted people to say- one of best teams ever in DIII -'Wake up ladies, not a cakewalk'	Collective Mission	Cohesion
-Everybody buying into the team -Eighteenth runner just as valuable -Never a top seven, was whatever we had on team -Get their confidence, bridge the gap -She let up, a team sacrifice -In cross country, you're racing for a team place -'I'm going to push to limit, same as they are' -Take care of yourself for the team -So they're all running for first place -Very centered on gifts -Not worried about junior high stuff -There were no issues with that group	Being on the Same Page	
-'Wow, this is an interesting collection' -Accepting different beliefs, life experiences -Relationship building builds a strong program -OK to be competitive and not affect friendship -Feeling of individualism, could beat teammates -When have good team, easier to get along -When going great, don't need gung-ho relationship	Blending into a Team	
-Leader like Steve, it means more than if I say -Really led by just tough running -Helped him in the evolutionary scale -Can come to me, but self-perpetuating now -I made him stick his neck out -I get around to each person individually -I became part of the whole daily mentoring	Leadership	

Table 3. (continued) Major Themes, Subthemes, and Summary Quotes

Summary Quotes	Subthemes	Major Theme
-Good talent, just didn't get chance to show it -She improved 1:12 in the 3000, freshman year -They ended up being very talented	Latent Ability	Talent
-If added up the All-Americans, incredible -If best in track, expect best in cross country -We were sturdy runners -Low numbers make huge difference at Nationals -We could have won if went back to seventh man	Proven Ability	
-Things fell into place just the right way -Everything came together on right date -They set a National Record -Seven ran lifetime PRs on same day	Outstanding Team Performance	Development
-Important for them to move up, develop -We came out of nowhere -'Wait a minute, we have practice tomorrow'	Development as Runners	
-This is about preparing you for life -Role modeling to show women have choices -Sport applies to life and it's not just work ethic -If not for running, would've stayed on the farm	Development as People	
-Fun is working towards a goal -This is really a great job -It came down to they really enjoyed it -We still get together now -Guys like that, they'll spoil ya	Fun/Satisfaction	

you've got a great team. And it's more attitude than anything else." Attitude was characterized as the mindset and feelings of the individual athletes toward their tasks in the sport. The theme of attitude was divided into four subthemes: (a) self-motivation; (b) competitiveness; (c) confidence; and (d) emotional control/perspective.

Self-motivation. Having team members possess strong self-motivation for their sport stood out to the coaches. For instance, Elaine described the initiative that her championship athletes took to best prepare for racing:

> That team had unbelievable desire and passion. They wanted to be the best... It's not the seniors saying, 'We want to do this.' It's not the coach saying, 'We want this.' It's a group of women wanting to be the best, but also them giving their best...It helps when you see yourself improving, that's the key. Then you want to train harder and you want to do more, you get caught up in doing all the little things that you need to do to be good.

Sam spoke similarly of his athletes taking initiative and illustrated an example of them giving their best in training. He stated:

> They would do more than what the workout asked for. It wasn't a matter of doing the minimum, they went over the *maximum*. I let them. I didn't even know they were doing this. We'd go to [a forest preserve] and these guys are doing hills, and then I find out they're doing the back-side of the hill at the end of the workout. I never told them to do that. They were doing that kind of stuff. *That* is incredible. Most people say, 'What do I have to do?' They'd say, 'What can I do today to get better?' It's a whole different attitude. You can't make people do that. It's got to be something that they have inside them. I can't motivate people. I only reinforce what they choose to do. Those guys were very motivated guys, and I was *thrilled* to have 'em.

Eric told a story of one of his athletes that demonstrated how individual athletes have differing self-motivation:

> We did some of that relaxation, visualization stuff...but some have different ways of motivating...We did it before a meet against [a conference school], which is a big rivalry, and that year it was going to be a really close meet. Thirty-five guys

> all lying on the ground relaxing, then there is this one guy just sitting up in the lawn. And I looked over and just went, you know, 'It's cool,' or something. So after we went through this whole visualization, he comes over to me and says, 'Sorry coach, I didn't mean to upset you. But I don't need that stuff. I just say, 'I hate [the rival school]!' He went out and won the race. So I go, 'OK, different guys have different heads and they know how to work it and I have to let them do that.'

Arthur spoke of the innateness of this drive when he described an athlete on his championship team:

> Laura[1] was one of those intense people. She played the violin two hours a day, she had perfect grades, she had about a 3.8 grade point average, she was a double major in music and physical education...It was really some kind of an attitude. I wish I knew how you put that into people. I don't think you can. It's like having a kick- some people have a kick, and I don't care how much speed they have or don't have.

Competitiveness. The second subtheme of attitude, competitiveness, was linked to self-motivation. Eric explained that the relationship of self-motivation and competitiveness was essential in racing excellence when he talked about his championship team's race at Nationals. There each athlete found motivation to lower the team's point total. He described:

> That last mile- they were just going to get anybody in the pack that they could get, and they knew they had to if they were going to have a chance to win. Of course, we were telling them, 'You got to get ten guys,' with a mile to go. We were telling every guy who went by, except for the top two (laughing) who were in the top ten, we said, 'You got to get two guys (laughing).' And the third, fourth, and fifth man all got ten guys, give or take, but about that. They went after it. They competed well. At that point, that's not me, that's just them going on inner-self... I mean to have all the guys come up with that at the end, that's beyond the coach's control at that point (laughing), it's really up to the athletes and the inner-fire there.

Similar to Eric's description of his athletes' inner fire in racing, Arthur

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[1] All the athletes mentioned in the study were given pseudonyms by the researcher to protect their anonymity.

discussed how his championship athletes had a different attitude towards racing than towards training. He explained:

> These people had a good attitude about racing...I mean race times were always better than training, *always.* They never ran a bad race, period...They'd kill themselves in competition...That team gutted it out...Having a couple of the right kind of people seemed to helped. They promoted a certain attitude.

Intra-team competitiveness during races was a characteristic of several of the championship teams. As Will described:

> We had four different guys that were our number one guy during the course of the season...I think what concerned them more was not necessarily if they got beat by a guy from another team, it's just that, you know, Matt wasn't going to let Eddy beat him very often, or if he did, the next week, he was going to be pretty determined that, 'I'm going to beat you next one. You aren't going to beat me.'

Elaine also talked about the benefits of intra-team competitiveness in the practices of her championship team:

> We had a group of competitors, and everyone was pushing one another 'cause we had the mix of middle distance and distance runners...It's good to have different leaders. I don't think it's good when the same person leads the workout all the time. If we were doing longer things, this group would be up front, and if you were doing shorter things, this group would be up front. You always had a challenge there. The same person wasn't up front all the time, the same person wasn't behind all the time. Different people got to shine on different days, and that kept everybody movin' up...I never think it's healthy to have the pecking order all established.

Anne Marie described how running against superior Division I and Division II teams during the season helped her championship team's competitiveness by comparing how her recent team had not gotten that type of competition. She explained:

> We are finding less and less opportunity during the year to find good, top-notch competition. Now [a competitive Division I invitational] runs a blue and a gold race, and so this year we ran the gold and we cleaned up. If we had run the blue we would have gotten beaten up, which is exactly what we need to learn how to run with top physical runners, and that's why we always take a trip to [that

> invitational], to run with that really tough competition...we're not being challenged like we once were. We won every race we ran this year until Nationals and then all of a sudden, when our feet are to the fire, not all of them stood up to the challenge (laughing).

Will also talked about competing against solid Division I and II teams during the season. For his team, it was fun to beat them. He related:

> Especially because we were a Division III school and we raced at [Division I invitationals], races where you raced against Division II schools and Division I schools, and we raced really well that year...We beat just a *ton* of really good teams...That was always fun, just to listen, 'God, we got beat by [the college]! Who the heck are these guys? I can't believe that!' And so we looked forward to that.

Furthermore, Will discussed being competitive against former high school rivals as important for his championship team:

> They were beating guys that had beaten them in high school, or they could look at guys and say, 'Man, that guy was so much better!' So that played into their competitiveness more than anything. They were very much into beating people that had beaten them previously.

Being competitive with the women's team from his school was also characteristic of Will's championship team. He explained:

> In cross-country, [the women's team coach] and I had a good series of teams there. We came across a really fortunate group of men and women, and that was *great*, there was a lot of competition between the women and men's team 'cause obviously we knew the women's team (laughing). And so, it was, 'God, we got to win it just because we got to stay even with the women (laughing)!'

Finally, Will talked about intra-team competition outside of racing and training.

> We all liked to compete, and they competed in practice, they competed in everything. I mean, when we went on road trips, they would be playing cards, and they would be competitive games... They would do that for fun and tons of stuff like eating a pint of ice cream instead of just a dollar cone...Dumb stuff like who could eat an ice cream cone the fastest.

Confidence. Confidence was the third subtheme of attitude that was figural

for the coaches. Elaine illustrated both her own and the team's confidence as follows:

> Everybody really and sincerely believed in what we wanted to accomplish and believed in their *hearts* that we were capable of accomplishing...I can still see them in my mind, on the line [at the Championship race] before the gun went off. I just see a group of women that you could tell by just looking at 'em, confident, intense. The race could start, 'I'm ready to go.' And all their habits were good, usually by the time they're a senior, you can tell if they are going to race well before the gun goes off. And I felt a sense of calm that nobody was over the edge.

Confidence was developed in a number of ways. Largely, the coaches in this study reported that it was a result of having the team perform well in previous National Championships. As Arthur described his championship team:

> That was our third National Championship in cross country, and we *expected* to win. We figured, well, we were *supposed* to win, that's all there was to it. We didn't think of anything else.

Anne Marie also spoke of the importance of having Nationals experience that gave individuals on her championship team confidence:

> They were very much veteran runners. I'm thinking at least the top seven runners were. They all ran on the [previous year's National Championship] team. They had a lot of competitive experience. They knew what it would take (laughing) to win a championship.

Elaine compared her championship team with her next year's non-championship team, to illustrate the importance of having positive expectations and no fear of failure in addition to having successful National Championship experience:

> They raced with no fear. They went to the line expecting to do well, not hoping to do well. There was just no fear of failure...They felt like, the next year, after they won the National title that there was pressure. 'I was an All-American last year, what happens if I'm not an All-American this year?' Instead of looking and saying, 'Wow, I was twentieth. I'll shoot to be in the top ten this year!' And they were looking at, 'What happens if we don't win?' Whereas, the year before, there wasn't any of that. They were just rollin', ready to go.

Also a factor in confidence was running a meet on the Nationals course during the season. As Anne Marie explained:

> Running the course previously helped us, we felt really comfortable knowing the course and knowing that it wasn't as easy as people thought. There were some deceptive inclines...we knew when to hold back, when to go for it (clap).

Will discussed how the athletes' confidence was also bolstered by consistent race performance:

> They were a confident group. They knew that they were going to win it all, and they did win it all. They could very much trust in their ability to perform well. There wasn't a single guy that choked ever in that group. They always ran tough. I'm certain that each of 'em had what they considered to be poor meets, but their bad was not all that bad, ever in their career. In their career, the bigger the meet, the better they ran. They were good that way, all of them were.

Confidence was gained from training as well as from races. Eric recounted how his team's experiencing a successful training plan increased positive expectations in racing. He explained:

> It was the first year that I pretty much duplicated the year's before workouts. Before that I had done a lot of experimenting. They had more of a confidence and they had really good patience because they had seen how things worked the year before. There is a lot in how a team races when there is some tradition. When you look back at past runners, and you know how they developed, and then if you've done it yourself, then you have even more confidence that that program you're doing is going to bring you to the right peak. A big part of peaking is having confidence that you are peaked, because I probably could have done four or five, ten, or I don't know how many different workouts with the same results. But if you switch a few things around and they're not sure, like, 'Am I doing too many miles, too few, am I going to have too much speed, not enough,' then they're not maybe as confident.

Furthermore, championship athletes gained confidence from training and racing with successful athletes. As Arthur noted:

> Having all those good people set the standard for those others and they expected it of themselves. And they just did it.

Sam stated that the feeling of togetherness also raised confidence in racing. He commented:

> Confidence was gained by developing a team mind that they did not feel isolated from one another.

Another component of confidence the participants discussed included their role as coaches. Anne Marie stated that a crucial part of her job as head coach was to instill confidence:

> The mental was more important than anything else. There's no magical training, maybe [another coach] has a little (laughing), but I don't have any. My goal is to really get the athletes to believe in themselves and to run with confidence. You know it was really a belief that they belonged up in the top. Once you get them to believe that, and they have had success feeling that, then they can run a self-fulfilling prophecy.

To Eric, being a sounding board in listening to athletes express confidence was significant. He told of a discussion with a top runner before the season:

> He came in and said, 'You know coach, I think we can win Nationals.' I said, 'Oh. Nobody else has said that?' He said, 'I don't know if they are thinking about that...but if we don't believe we can do it, it's not going to happen by chance.'

Sam described how his team's confidence was more implicit. He explained,

> There was kind of an underlying feeling, it wasn't something that was *spouted* out or talked about. There was an underlying feeling that they could be the best of the best. It was something that was felt, which is far more powerful. There wasn't a lot of rah-rah.

Emotional control/ perspective. The fourth subtheme of attitude that emerged from the interview was maintaining emotional control and a mature perspective in the intense environment of athletics. Elaine described emotional control as follows:

> You control the things you can control, and you'll be able to adapt to everything else. And we're not in a sport that I can block you or tackle you. I really can

> control what I do, so you should set yourself up to have your best race. And you can't control what [another school] is going to do. And so it's pretty much taking care of your own business and just being focused on what you're going to do.

In terms of perspective, Elaine went on to state:

> And the other thing is when the big meets come up, we don't change anything. It's just a race. It's not the end of the world. The sun is going to come up in the East and set in the West, although we don't feel it sometimes! Mom and Dad are still going to love you no matter what happens out there. You have to keep that in perspective, which is a hard thing to do.

Emotional control/perspective throughout the course of the season was a subtheme for the coaches. Anne Marie illustrated this by describing an athlete on her championship team:

> Jenny was the kind of runner who would get better as the season would progress, and you knew she was just kind of gauging her emotional energy. Like, 'I'm just going to give this much this week.' And in September she would do enough to help the team 'cause she didn't need to win the race, she didn't need to be number one, and she and Sue kind of fought back and forth over their career. But you knew come the end of the season, come Regionals, come Nationals, that she was going to be there for you.

Emotional control/perspective before and during the National Championship race was especially important. As Eric explained:

> We got through the season at a pretty good rate of performing very well without having to get too up psychologically for it. Then from there, you can do one of two things. You can say, 'OK, here's the big meet. Let's really get up and do even better.' Or you can say, 'See how well you've done by staying calm and just letting your body do the work.' We leaned toward the second, although it's pretty hard to hold back your adrenaline the day before Nationals (laughing).

An athlete on Arthur's team showed emotional control when she had a problem with her uniform at the starting line of Nationals about ten minutes before the gun. Arthur stated her emotional control was also typical of the other members on his championship team:

> We got another uniform and she changed on the starting line. We just gathered around her in a big group, we didn't have time for her to go over someplace and change. We just brought (laughing) her another, I'll never forget that, and she still got second. So I mean that wasn't going to upset her, *nothing* was going to upset her, and that's the kind of attitude they had.

According to the coaches of this study, emotional control was particularly key in running the first part of the National Championship race, as Eric explained:

> If you're going to finish in the top hundred, and everybody is going out fast, or almost everybody, you could be in a hundred fiftieth, hundred sixtieth, at the mile mark. How can you run that and not get discouraged? How can you do that and be thinking about moving up all the time...you need people that are really solid mentally and it is a somewhat overlooked part of racing.

Anne Marie spoke of her team's emotional control and perseverance during the especially intense parts of races. She stated:

> They were mentally very tough. It involves knowing how to handle the pressure. They knew when the competition was intense, physical, they're not going to back down. They're going to keep their wits about them during tough races.

Elaine brought up an instance of one of her championship athletes maintaining emotional control in the later stages of the National Championship to overcome adversity:

> Our second runner *biffed*, fell at Nationals, with about a thousand meters to go, I remember that, and ended up getting up there.

Finally, after the National Championship race, the "maturity" of Eric's championship team impressed him. He explained:

> When we finished, the announcer said, '[Another school] won the meet.' They actually announced it, so the guys said, 'Oh, did they win it? What did we get?' I said, 'That was close. We could be anywhere from first to fourth, but you guys ran great, there is nothing to worry about. Let's go get on our cool-down and when you come back, we'll find out (laughing).' But that's kind of hard, you're out on your cool-down and they don't know, and then halfway, someplace, somebody came running over and told them they won. They didn't go screaming

> around the course, like spinning around. They just sort of, 'Oh.' I mean they were really pleased, obviously, but nobody went berserk. I think they had that satisfaction. I was proud of them because they weren't like, 'OK, it's life or death whether we won that. We are just going to lie down here waiting to see.' Or start bewailing because somebody announced that [another school] won. 'OK, let's cool-down, that's what we always do.'

In summary, attitude was the first major theme that emerged from the coaches' interviews about their most successful National Championship team. Attitude was perceived to be the thoughts and feelings of the team members in relation to their tasks, and included the four subthemes: self-motivation, competitiveness, confidence, and emotional control/perspective.

Theme Two: Cohesion

Cohesion was the second major theme that emerged from the coaches' descriptions of their most successful National Championship teams. Cohesion was seen as the way the team worked together and viewed itself as unified. Four subthemes of cohesion stood out: (a) having a collective mission; (b) being on the same page; (c) leadership; and (d) blending into a team.

Collective mission. A prevalent subtheme of cohesion was having a team mission. Anne Marie and Elaine both described how their teams made a pact immediately after the National Championship race in the previous year. Anne Marie recounted how the team created a clear goal before their first National Championship, which was the year before their most successful National Championship team. She stated:

> They had a really bad race and finished ninth in just horrible conditions. Right there, they just kind of made a pact, 'This is not going to happen again.' And it took pretty much from June on, mentally, to start thinking about what it would

> take to win a championship, what kind of a commitment. What kind of personal goals, the sacrifices it takes.

Anne Marie continued to talk about how the mission was made explicit and focused on consistently. She related:

> I remember, especially a couple of them, were just so focused on November 18th, whenever Nationals were that day. They had it written by their bed-stands, they had it written in their notebooks, they had it in their notes in their particular classes. They just focused on that and on what they were going to accomplish, and that was a constant reminder for them for what they had to get ready for. And so the whole season was drawn toward that day. Earlier [in that decade] we had three runner-up teams [at the National Championships] . The mental outlook was, 'We've got to do the work.' But they always thought it was a jinx to talk about winning or it wasn't humble or whatever. Finally, we got over that and started to think like a winner.' And so we talked about being National Champions, we progressed to, 'Look, if you want to win, you got to talk about those goals all season.

Elaine emphasized how the main team goal arose from the athletes, not her:

> I don't remember what place we finished the year before, but they got together after the meet and vowed that the next year that they would make a run at the National title. And it wasn't me having to put that in their brains (laughing), that was them wanting to do something...They were like on a mission.

Likewise, Sam spoke of how he did not generate his championship team's main goal, which became more meaningful for his athletes. He asserted:

> My feeling is that when a coach gives a team a goal, it lacks any kind of power, but when internally, a team sets it for themselves, it's magnified, it's very powerful. So I really don't know what they did talk about. A lot of what happened, happened behind closed doors. I became a driver, driving the van to get them there. That's all it took, they were that together. They needed very little coaching. The best teams I have ever had need very little coaching. The worst teams need a lot of coaching.

The teams were aware of how good they could be and created goals that reflected their belief. Will explained:

> We had a better team than when we won [the previous year]. We knew that our

> team was good, and really our goal from the very beginning was we wanted to win Nationals, and repeat, and we wanted to be a really *dominant* Division III team, and we didn't lose to any Division III teams during the course of the year, and that was one goal that we had. But we really just wanted to win. We wanted to be a really good team, not just on the Division III level, but to have people think of us as being one of the best teams ever in Division III.

Finally, the teams' missions were revisited throughout the year. Anne Marie recounted how her team refocused after a disappointing mid-season race:

> We went to Pre-Nationals in October and lost to [another school]. That was the best thing that could have ever happened. We didn't run particularly well, we weren't very focused, and all of a sudden it was just like [snaps her fingers], 'Wake up ladies, this is not a cakewalk. Just 'cause you won it last year doesn't mean you're going to win it this year.' And that just totally refocused them. They sat down by themselves for forty-five minutes and just talked and said, 'Look, what do we need to do to get focused and get our priorities in line?'

Being on the same page. The second subtheme of cohesion was being on the same page and was used to describe how the members were unified in accomplishing the team mission. Being on the same page involved athletes fulfilling their team role. Elaine stated:

> It's always wonderful to win the team trophy. It was a culmination of everybody being on the same page, all striving for the same type of thing...everybody knowing the role that they played and accepting that role. And everybody buying into what the team wanted to accomplish.

The role of the whole team, not just the seven runners racing at Nationals, was a common theme. Anne Marie described how she emphasized every member's role. She explained:

> We generally carry about eighteen runners, and they are going to be of varying abilities. We do cut and that's kind of a college-wide athletics-wide policy, but you are still going to get a range of abilities, but I try to teach them that the eighteenth runner is just as valuable to the team, everyone has something to contribute. They can be an encourager, they can be a role model in their own work ethic, how they handle injuries, they can be a good prayer partner, they can

> be a good leader, a good vocal leader and be number twelve. And so we all can't be C.E.O.s in life. Very few of us are going to be C.E.O.s and that we just have to find our niche in life. It's going to be an important niche, whether pushing the broom or following the big paycheck. It's going to be an important role, so take up your yoke.

Sam talked about the support the whole team gave to the top seven of his championship team:

> A factor was the tremendous support from other teammates. When we were in [the National championship site], we didn't make anybody go out there, and we figured out that maybe there was only one guy on the team that wasn't there... They were part of the total synergy. It was never a top seven, it was whatever we had on the team that was very cohesive. They knew they were sharing something very special.

Eric discussed the roles that his team members played while racing:

> It doesn't necessarily consign a guy to a particular spot, when you have been a National Champ, you're not going to tell a freshman to go out with him and beat him, unless you really have a phenomenal guy. So I think they sort of know- we use the word 'pecking order' for where they are- a bit, and at least later in the season they can gauge their race a little off those teammates. And if I want somebody to step it up I say, 'Just hold back a little bit the first two miles so that this guy can run with you.' And they get their confidence, and you bridge the gap a little, so if you have a guy thirty seconds behind your next guy, you can bring ten or fifteen behind. But at Nationals, they kind of know where they are.

Being on the same page also involved being reliable in races. Anne Marie illustrated how one of her championship runners made sure to do her team job in the championship race by not risking going out too hard and exhausting her energy, but possibly giving up a better individual place. Anne Marie reflected:

> Sue actually took it out and was in the lead, yet she knew that she was not going to be able to hang on, so she intentionally backed off just so that she wouldn't go out the back door 'cause that could have cost us, and would have been a huge risk. So she let up a little and that was kind of a team *sacrifice* 'cause she gave up some personal goals.

Furthermore, running together with a teammate or pack running was a characteristic of being on the same page. Anne Marie talked about the benefits of pack running for her championship team:

> That year, pack running helped. They definitely talked with each other. We really encourage that. If you're together- you're talking, you're encouraging, you're saying, 'Let's go, let's go after so and so.' It does give you motivation to set aside your kind of goals and make it more of a team goal, which is different from track when you're still racing for a place as well as a time. But in cross country, you're racing for a *team* place.

Eric explained how his athletes may not have been running in a pack but were cognizant of their teammates in the race:

> Steve and George ran together for quite a bit, they were the only two…The other guys were more spread out…They knew where their teammates were and they knew what they could do…We said, 'You may not see your teammate but you got to know they're out there pushing to the limit, and if you have any doubts in your head, you have to answer, I'm going to push to the limit same as they are.'

Sam illustrated how being on the same page for his championship team revolved around trust, and trust involved more than the actions during practice and meets. He explained:

> You don't have anyone on different pages. You don't have somebody that's out there thinking about himself, and you got somebody else that can't wait for the party on Saturday night, and you got somebody else who really wants to be the best that he can be. They got to all be accountable and responsible to one another…Individually, if you take care of yourself for the team, then you're contributing, and if a guy is motivated to be the best to his ability, committed to what he is doing and *dedicated*, then he is contributing. The guy that's the slowest on the team can be a major contributor. And you can have the *best* guy on the team, and if he's a loafer and not making the most of it, he's hurting everybody because everyone knows it. From a very conscious to a very unconscious level you know when guys are dedicated, and you know when they are on the same page, and you know when they aren't. That's where the trust develops.

The coaches spoke of being on the same page to describe how their athletes were trying to perform their best. Arthur discussed how his athletes were on the same page in trying to win Nationals as individuals:

> They all had legitimate reasons to think they could win. And they were trying to beat each other, there's no doubt (laughing). So they're all running for first place, they're not running to see how low of a score they can get, they're running to win the race (laughing). Score is just a plus.

For Anne Marie's team, being on the same page revolved around spirituality. She described:

> They were a very spiritual team, they were very centered on their gifts. They had a gift, the gift of running, and they wanted to use that gift to give God glory and witness to others...And when you have a focus like that it makes those little pettinesses disappear and things that can happen naturally when their focus is a little bit different.

Likewise, Elaine cited an absence of minor conflicts, which she called "junior high stuff." She stated:

> Everyone was focused on the same thing and not worried about the junior high stuff (laughing), things that don't matter- how fast is the warm-up, how fast is the cool-down, this person said this to me, this person said that to me, I don't like this person- how junior high kids act.

Also, none of the coaches discussed any major conflicts between team members. In fact, Elaine discussed how her championship team could have had problems when she made the National team line-up with two positions in question, but didn't:

> Everybody, of course wanted to be on the National team. There was a decision. Obviously, the woman with the shoe thing [the athlete did not have the right shoes at the conference race and did not place in the team's top seven. Therefore, she ran the open race at Regionals, won the open race, was put back into the top seven at Nationals where she was the team's number one runner and placed tenth overall], she got to go back on, which means somebody else that ran Regionals had to come off. And actually our second woman in the open race was a second faster than our sixth woman, so that was a bit of a tough decision. But even when

> the decision was made, in fact, there wasn't, or sometimes it becomes an issue because this group thinks this person should go and this group thinks that person should go. There were no issues with that group. It was just accepted and away they went.

Blending into a team. Successful integrating of different types of individuals into a team was a subtheme of cohesion that frequently emerged. Eric explained this concept as follows:

> Taking kids with all different kinds of ideas and backgrounds, goofiness, seriousness, garrulous versus shy, and all that, and making them all happy on the team, and feeling a part of it, of working together. You get that joy as the coach, but the team gets, 'Wow this is an interesting collection of guys that we have here…" But somehow it blends together to create this great team ethos that keeps going. I think, for a coach, that's a real knack, if you can create that and keep all those people feeling a really valuable part of the team-from the first guy to the fortieth. And they have a place, and they are improving, and they are working hard, and they care about 'em. And that's not easy.

Elaine described some of the differences between members of her championship team and their cohesive relationship:

> They were very accepting of others that might have been different or had different beliefs than they had, whether it be religious or just life stories. We had people from lots of different backgrounds, like from a small farm background to a big city background, some with lots of life experiences (laughing) and some with not any. But everybody just kind of rolled…There was really good chemistry. And they all hung out together. And even the seniors would hang out with the freshman.

Like Elaine, Anne Marie stressed the importance of acceptance:

> We have a family atmosphere that is very attractive to athletes…that is what builds a strong program, those close ties, the relationship building.

Will described the personalities of individuals on his championship team as "conservative," "gutsy," "mature," "prankster," "great story teller." He discussed how they interacted as teammates and friends:

> They were a good blend of guys where there was just enough ego but not so much that it got in the way of their friendship, but enough ego to want to become better and better...Once practice was over, they could laugh about it, and kid about how, 'I'm going to kill you next week.' You know, in a friendly way, but they could work together that way, and that really helped *all* of them become better. You need to have that, and as a coach, you really like to see that, being able to recognize that it's OK to be really competitive under the practice environment and not have that affect your friendship at all. And that's a unique situation.

Arthur also talked about how his team had different personalities and although they may not have been the best of friends, they worked well together as teammates. He explained:

> We had a good mix of personalities...They were very different personalities individually...I don't know if they did things together as a group...that team was really into their own things (laughing)...So they really kind of just got together to train and race, that was about it...That promoted a feeling of individualism that allowed them to feel that they were good, and could beat their teammates. Maybe 'cause they didn't spend a lot of time together, they weren't so hung up on a hierarchy within the team like a lot of teams are. You know, they spend every workout together, and they spend every day together, and they go out to eat together and all that, and pretty soon they establish a pecking order, they know who's going to win. If your best person has a lousy day, everybody else has a lousy day 'cause they're judging by where that person is, 'I should be behind 'em,' and so on. That group didn't care, 'If the person who is better than me has a bad day, I'm beating 'em, that's all there is to it.' And that made them good, it really did.

Will suggested that while blending together and having a jovial atmosphere kept the team relaxed, the athletes also knew the extent of how much fun to have at each other's expense. He also noted how winning makes the process of getting along smoother:

> Those guys got along pretty well, they knew exactly how far they could go and not cross the line. They did play a lot of practical jokes [on each other] and did a lot of funny things, and stayed very loose. But it's also when you know that you have a really good team, and you know that you're going to do well, it's a lot easier to get along.

Arthur took the idea that it is easier to get along when the team is performing well a step further by describing how developing close friendships are obviated by success:

> In more recent years, they have been more together as a team and have gotten gradually gotten worse in our performance. But I don't know if they have gotten worse because of that, or if they have come together because they aren't running as well, trying to support each other. Maybe when everything is going great, you don't feel the need to kind of get together and have a gung-ho relationship. But that group was particularly a group of individuals, no doubt about it.

Leadership. The fourth subtheme of cohesion was leadership. The coaches described how their leadership as coaches was influential, but usually in a modest way. They talked more about the significance of athlete leadership. For instance, Eric spoke of the importance of having a vocal athlete-leader on his championship team:

> When you have a leader like Steve that can be really upbeat and say, 'Hey guys, this is really going to be fun. Let's go out and do it. We've been training, we're all set,' that means more to them than if I say that to them because they know the coach is going to say that to them. It helps when I say it to them and I have some confidence, but if they have that from a teammate, right the day before, or even sometimes right in the little huddle five minutes before the race, that's great.

Furthermore, the coaches also described athletes who were more leaders by example. Anne Marie cited one of her championship athletes who led by this indirect method:

> Sue was actually a transfer student who really led by just tough running. In workouts, she was always putting the pedal to the medal. Always out and leading the pack. She was never content with just running workouts, she always forced the pace, especially in intervals. She was not a real vocal leader...Her leadership was much more demonstrative.

Sam illustrated an example of athletes providing both vocal and demonstrative leadership in racing and the effect that leadership had when he related a story of a race the year before Nationals and then the Nationals race:

> Pete and Bob ran side by side with Dave struggling behind them, but still they were clearly away from the rest of the pack and so they kind of guided Dave, encouraged him, mentored him, influenced him, provided great leadership…And in the last lap, they encouraged Dave to take the lead and win the conference championship. Either Pete or Bob could have clearly, easily won and Dave would not have won, but they wanted him to feel like a winner as a freshman and know what it felt like to win, to help him in the evolutionary scale of becoming an athlete in the program and also know what teamwork is all about, what selflessness is all about, that synergy is a very real factor. And so the next year that you are talking about, Dave was a sophomore and Pete was a senior, and Pete had at one point two hundred yards on the field and so two hundred yards on Dave. And in the last mile and a half Dave *caught* Pete and Pete turned around to see who it was, you know. Dave said, 'Don't worry it's me. You're going to win.' He was repaying all the mentorship and all the influence, and all that the program meant to him, in showing that this was now a part of him- the selflessness.

The coaches also described examples of their own leadership. For instance, Annie Marie explained how she implemented a mentoring program with her championship team, where she actually delegated several leadership duties to her athletes:

> Cross country runners *here* tend to be introverted and quiet and introspective, and that makes you really focused, and it makes you a great student (laugh), and it makes you an *excellent* distance runner, but it doesn't make you a good leader (laugh). And so I had to find a creative way. I kind of struggled with lack of leadership. I felt like I was doing all of the work, I was doing all the leading, and it worked *so* much better when the students did the leading. But students need to be taught how to lead, and so I give them responsibilities early. Everyone from a sophomore on up is considered a mentor, assuming they have had one year of experience. Every new runner, even if they are a junior (laughing), is called a mentee. They get put with a mentor…So that by the time they're seniors, they have three years of being leaders, taking responsibility, holding their teammates accountable, supporting their teammates…And they're responsible for all the orientation of the new runners, college life, do's and don'ts, what profs to take (laugh), anything that's college related. And of course they can come to me but it has been kind of self-perpetuating now. So what I ended up with that year was *great* leadership.

The coaches also talked about how they guided their championship athletes

through the process of training and racing. Will discussed his leadership in the following account:

> Brad was always a more conservative guy and then I *made* him stick his neck out. I forced him at our home meet, just saying, 'You can take a chance. You should go out there and run with Eddy and Matt.' And we made a pact as a team that all five guys were just going to hammer through three miles on our home course. And I told 'em, 'I don't care if you have to walk, but you *have* to be under fifteen minutes at three miles.' And they were like 14:48 or 14:45, and it wasn't easily done, and Brad won that day. From then on, it was a turning point because before that, he always used to lay back with Randy or Tim, and he was just a good solid number four or five guy for us and Matt and Eddy would always be up there for us. But then, from that time on, he was always our number one or two man. At Nationals, he was our first guy, he was sixth in the country.

Eric spoke of the difference in his leadership for each individual versus the whole team. He explained:

> When I have a team meeting and I'm trying to start talking about the meet ahead, I feel I have more of a set talk, still kind of general, and then I try to get around to each person individually, a day or two or occasionally the morning of the race at breakfast, which I probably wouldn't do during Nationals. But we try and cover our strategies before, so that they can just relax with it and not have to think too much at that point. But it's in their heads so when they get to that point in the race they have some help if they think of it.

Finally, Sam described his leadership in the following way:

> The evolution to that point, yeah, I hope I had influence on it, and reinforced the characteristics that they had. The whole daily mentoring and understanding what we're doing, and the feeling that we have, and the workouts, and everything else. Yeah, there's a role in that, but eventually they took it upon themselves and improved it. I mean, who couldn't have coached that group when they evolved to that point?

Hence, the second major theme of the coaches' experience was cohesion. Cohesion was seen as how the athletes related with each other. Important to cohesion were the subthemes: having a collective mission, being on the same page, blending into a

team, and leadership.

Theme Three: Talent

Talent was a major theme that every coach discussed in the interviews about their championship teams. Talent was comprised of the two subthemes of: (a) latent ability and (b) proven ability.

Latent ability. Many of the championship runners had talent that did not come to fruition until college. Will described the latent talent of his athletes as follows:

> Most of these guys were from smaller towns…They were virtually, we had a bunch of unknowns really in high school…Because they did come from a small high school, a lot of them did other sports…None of those guys were year-round runners in high school…And so they probably had, they had good talent, they just didn't get a chance to show it that much in high school. A lot of that is 'cause if they are from a small town, they may never race against good competition until State, and that means you only have one opportunity to get your time down…But I bet if they would have had three or four more competitions like that or races against better guys during the year, they would have been better in high school. But because they weren't, then I had the opportunity to go get 'em to come to school here, so it wasn't all bad.

Arthur expressed more surprise about his top runner's latent talent:

> Bridget came to college, her PR was 4:50 in the 1500 and 10:40 in the 3000, and she ran 4:28 and 9:28 as a freshman. I mean she improved a minute and twelve seconds in the 3000, her freshman year! And I don't know why. Why didn't she run better than that in high school? She was that good, I don't know why she didn't run better than that.

Sam's following comment intimated that his athletes' talent wasn't immediately apparent:

> Well, they ended up being very talented.

Proven ability. Previously shown cross country talent was also emphasized by the coaches. Performing well in previous cross country seasons, especially at Nationals, was a significant sign that the team members were talented. Sam stated:

> If you added up the All-American honors, it would be incredible…You got in that very top seven, three [cross country] National Champions. That speaks for itself…You cannot discount talent. You can say all this good stuff with teamwork and everything else, but if guys just don't have that kind of ability, you're not going to get that kind of performance.

For Arthur, talent was the first characteristic that stood out for him about his championship team. He stressed how his athletes' proven talent in track carried over into cross country, especially boosting their confidence. As he described:

> Clearly they were very talented. All five of those people on that top five had been All-American on the track…Three of them had been National Champions (laughing) on the track…I mean, if you are the best 3000 runner in Division III you expect to beat most everybody in cross country. So, you went into the race expecting to finish waaaay up there, and they automatically did.

On the other hand, Anne Marie compared her championship runners with her current team to explain her championship runners' talent in cross country that not all track runners possess:

> We were pretty sturdy runners. My team this year was really slight of build. And I think that the cold weather would have hurt us and hot weather would have hurt us. You know, really slight, skinny kids don't have quite the reservoir of strength to handle adverse conditions…You got to be strong. That's why I say cross country is a little different because some the women on my team had a really nice track season because they really are more finesse runners. You find that these types of runners are very efficient runners, but you put 'em on hills, and you shove 'em around a little bit, and they struggle.

Having especially talented lead runners was also important in being successful at the National Championships. As Anne Marie described:

> I had two *very* talented lead runners, top ten, top twelve caliber runners… Those low numbers make a huge difference at Nationals. This year, my best runner was 29th. You know that's great, but if your number one is 29th as opposed to *5th*, that's a lot of points, that's a trophy right there.

Lastly, having a team that had a number of talented runners, or team depth, was

a characteristic of several of the championship teams. Will discussed the benefit of having a talented top seven as follows:

> We had five really good guys and then we had two guys who were good... Those guys made 'em feel that if something went wrong up front we would still be able to win. We could play those games- even if we knocked off one of our top guys (laughing) we could have won, even if we had to go back to six, or if we had to go back to seven.

In summary, talent was the third major theme in the coaches' experience of their most successful National Championship team, and was described as latent ability and proven ability.

Theme Four: Development

The fourth major theme that emerged from the coaches' interviews was the development of the championship team. The first subtheme of development was an outstanding team performance at Nationals. The second development subtheme was the improvement of the athletes as runners. The third subtheme was the improvement of the athletes as people, and the final subtheme was satisfaction and enjoyment.

Outstanding team performance. The rarity of their team's performance at Nationals stood out to the coaches. As Eric reflected:

> That race our team was one that rarely occurred where things all fell into place just the right way.

Elaine related a similar fascination with her team's performance at the National Championship:

> They put an awesome meet together at the National Championships. Everything came together on the right date...the best team race I've ever had (laughing)...I had forgotten our split [between the 1st and 5th runners] was that close. Fifteen seconds is remarkable, this year we were a 1:45-something.

Sam noted the team's outstanding score and their place in history as follows:

> Obviously what stands out is they set a National Record with [number of] points, and they ran the best team performance of any that has been run in the history of NCAA Division III.

What stood out to Annie Marie was how each runner ran their best race ever on the same day and how rare that is. She admitted:

> It takes a certain amount of luck…That day, all seven run PRs [personal records]. Of course, it was a fast course, but it was still great to have seven run PRs, lifetime PRs on the same day. It was (laughs) one of those great things, and that happens in sport once in awhile.

Development as runners. The improvement in performances of the championship runners over their collegiate career was a subtheme of development that emerged. Will illustrated the improvements of his athletes:

> Wes, Eddy, Dave, and Roy all probably ran under 4:30 for the mile in high school but none of them ran under 4:20. And so they were good solid high school runners, but nothing that you would look at to say, later on that, 'Wow, Eddy would run 8:55 in the steeple, Matt would run 14:20 [for 5000 meters], and Brad would run 30:15 [for 10,000 meters] and be second in the country'…But they all developed really well, and that was important for them…They enjoyed being able to move up, to develop, to continue to improve.

Elaine also expressed how her athletes' improvement was surprising. She exclaimed:

> It was neat because we came out of nowhere. If I look back, in high school they were OK runners but not great runners.

Anne Marie jokingly reflected on one of her championship athlete's improvement:

> I had a senior (laughing) who as a freshman came in, she was just clueless. She came in, and she was like a week late, walks in, 'I want to run cross country.' And we let her run with us. She looked good, she had a nice stride and everything, and you could tell she had some natural talent, but *no* conditioning.

> After practice she says, 'OK, so I'll see you in a couple days.' I'm going, 'Now wait a minute. We have practice *tomorrow* (laughing).' And to make a long story short, by the time she was a senior, she was All-American…She was a very inspirational runner because she came from nowhere and then over four years developed into a great runner.

Development as people. How the sport experience helped the athletes' develop as people was a common theme discussed by the coaches. Anne Marie spoke of the team's and her own perception of how important sport was for student-athlete maturation. She described:

> We always start out with a picnic…One of the things I always have the upper-classmen do is go around and say what was the one thing they wish they knew as freshman…So you start out right away setting the tone of, 'What can I help you with? We're here to help you grow. We are here to help you mature.' And we view this as a very educational experience. So, this isn't just about running. This is about preparing you for life. So they take this *mode* of athletics pretty seriously…It's a really integral part of their college education.

Furthermore, Anne Marie talked about how she tried to teach them about life through her example:

> My daughter traveled with us. They see we are more than coaches, we have a life (laughing). And also role modeling for them that I want them to be able to see that women do have choices. You may choose to be a stay-at-home mom, and that's wonderful, but you also can be out there and choose not to marry and have a career, you can choose to marry and have a family and still have a career. So what I try and teach them is that it's a balance, it's not an easy balance, but that with good help and support it can be done.

Eric described how he has seen sport's lasting effect on his athletes' confidence and ability to work with others. He related:

> That's one of the great things about this sport is that it gives you that self-confidence and the strength inside to do those things, and then what we always say as coaches, carries over into life, some of these lessons…And I guess you have to be somewhat anecdotal, but I think they really do and I've seen it in these kids. They are very shy or very unself-assured and in four years, they come out of it, in that they are a lot better working with people, they have a lot more

> confidence in themselves, and you can see how it applies and it's not just the work ethic or something.

Finally, Will explained how athletics drew several of his championship athletes into college, which led to future success in their careers:

> Brad was in college strictly because he loved to run, he wasn't a great student by any means at all, he was only in college just to run and to continue to have fun running. Now, he is using his education, he teaches high school biology and coaches, but without running he would have never been in college, neither would have Eddy. And Roy was just in college really to run, although he is a good math guy and he's got a business downtown...But they all got degrees and they are all doing good stuff, but if it wouldn't have been for running, I don't see, Brad would have just stayed on the farm, and Roy probably would have taken over his dad's business. And Eddy has actually become a better student with age (laughing). He was nothing in college, and now he's got his masters degree and he's thinking about getting a doctorate, for God's sake!

Fun/satisfaction. A sense of enjoyment and satisfaction for both the athletes and coaches often developed from the championship experience. Elaine talked about how the previous subtheme of development as people was tied to fun and satisfaction. As she described:

> Accomplishing something that you never thought you'd be able to accomplish, that is very fun. Fun is also working towards a goal and maybe taking two years to achieve that goal, but it's a great sense of accomplishment...The most fun is reaching your potential, and the path there is never easy (laughing) with all the little bumps and sometimes big hills along the way. And you learn life's lessons...Part of college is growing up and learning to stretch your horizons.

Also, Elaine expressed her joy in coaching her championship team:

> I remember thinking, 'Well, this is really a great job (laughing)! What a great job right now!

Likewise, Will recapitulated his team's and his experience as:

> Most of it came down to they really enjoyed it, they had a good time. *We* had a lot of fun that year.

Also, coaches remarked how their championship teams are still connected. Will described:

> They were really a fun team. We still get together now. We got together on a ten year reunion, at Wes's house, and told stories, and had a cookout and picnic and stuff. So, I'm in touch with these guys. They're all on my mailing list, email list...Matt and Roy both live in the area, Eddy is coaching [at a college in the conference], Brad is at [a high school about an hour away], and Wes is working in [a town about a half hour away], so they're all around yet.

Finally, Sam spoke of the enjoyment he had coaching his championship team and how special that team was to him:

> It was just a tremendous group of guys to coach. When you have guys like that, they'll spoil ya. I thought we'd always have people like that. It isn't always that way. It's very frustrating from a coaching standpoint when you have teams that don't *click*, teams that don't connect, individuals that don't try to be the *best* that they can be. It's the hardest thing...But *that* team was a coach's dream.

Thus, development was the fourth theme that emerged from the coaches' interviews. Development included the subthemes: an outstanding championship performance, development as runners, development as people, and fun/satisfaction.

Summary

Several themes emerged from the experience of the coaches' most successful National Championship cross country team. These themes were clustered into the four major themes of a*ttitude*, *cohesion*, *talent*, and *development*. The major themes and their respective subthemes should be considered both separately and as a whole in order to arrive at an understanding of the coaches' championship team experience (see Pollio et al., 1997). For instance, having effective leadership is a significant subtheme of cohesion but also has a powerful influence on attitude, particularly confidence. Also, blending into

a team is an essential subtheme of cohesion but may also fit into development. Therefore, the themes are very much interrelated.

In the next chapter, the themes as they relate to the sport psychology literature are described. Also, possible implications of this study for coaches, sport psychology consultants, and researchers are discussed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide rich and varied descriptions of the experience of NCAA Division III National Championship cross country teams as perceived by their coaches. In the previous chapter, the themes of the coaches' experience were shown and discussed. Discussed in this chapter are possible relationships of the major themes *attitude*, *cohesion*, *talent*, and *development* and their subthemes to the sport psychology literature. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for practitioners are suggested.

Attitude

The first theme to emerge was attitude, and consisted of the subthemes self-motivation, competitiveness, confidence, and emotional control/perspective. The sport psychology literature shows that self-motivation is key to team success. For instance, Janssen (1999) discusses how the difference between mediocre and extraordinary teams is usually commitment, and commitment is often best achieved by having the athletes feel a sense of involvement. Instead of feeling like are obligated to do something, the athletes have a deeper feeling of wanting to do something. The self-motivation and competitiveness of the teams in this study were, to a large extent, directed towards beating other teams and winning the National Championship. This motivation may have worked well because the members of these teams had a high perceived ability, which Nicholls (1989) suggests is necessary if one is to be successful with an ego orientated

goal of beating others. However, these teams also exhibited high task motivation, emphasizing effort- "giving their best," "going over the maximum," and improving, which may have kept them focused on their performance as well as the outcome.

The sport psychology literature also supports the coaches' emphasis on confidence. Gould, Greenleaf, Lauer, and Chung (1999) found that self-efficacy and team-efficacy was the most important influence in performance for US Olympic athletes competing in the 1998 Winter Olympic Games. Consistent with Bandura's (1977) model of antecedents of self-efficacy, the coaches credited past championship performance to modeling the workouts of past championship runners in the programs, using verbal persuasion to have athletes "believe in themselves and to run with confidence," and observing their physiological state. As Elaine stated, "You could tell by just looking at 'em, confident." Also, coaches talked about feeling comfortable on the course and with challenging competition as a source of confidence, which fits Vealey's (1986) category of environmental comfort. Furthermore, the teams' belief that they had been peaked right exemplifies having confidence due to a belief in the coach's leadership (Vealey, 1986).

In discussing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, Vallerand and Rousseau (2001) explain that people have an inherent need to feel relatedness. If an athlete perceives social factors like seeing one's self close to a teammate or simply being aware of the connection with teammates, a sense of competence and therefore, confidence may rise. As Sam described, the source of his team's confidence was that "They did not feel isolated from one another." This statement is consistent with Vealey's (1986) idea that social support increases sport confidence.

In the subtheme of emotional control/perspective, the coaches' emphasis on "just being focused on what you're going to do" goes along with the stress placed on a task orientation by Nicholls (1989). Along the same lines, Nideffer (1976) considers the concept of orientation as attention and divides attention into two categories: the breadth and the direction of focus. According to Nideffer (1976), attention may vary on a continuum from an extremely narrow focus (filtering out a lot of information) to an extremely broad one (paying attention to large amounts of information). Also, one may direct attention externally (the environment) or internally (thoughts and feelings). For competitive distance running, Nideffer (1976) suggests that an optimal focus is narrow-internal. For instance, an athlete may focus on their own pace, mechanics, and breathing during a race. Of course, paying attention to other competitors in the race and the terrain is necessary, but as the coaches explained, cross country athletes usually race best when they focus on their individual task, monitor their own body and thoughts, and not focus on too many things.

Having emotional control particularly in the championship race relates to Yerkes and Dodson's (1908, as cited in Weinberg & Gould, 1999) inverted-U hypothesis which suggests that there is a curvilinear relationship between physiological arousal and performance. Therefore, as physiological arousal increases, there is a corresponding increase in performance until optimal performance is achieved. Beyond that point, further increases in arousal result in a decrease in performance. In the catastrophe model (Hardy,1990), cognitive anxiety is considered in addition to physiological arousal and one's cognitive arousal is assumed to mediate the effects of physiological arousal on

performance. Also, if arousal goes beyond the optimal level, then there will be a sharp decline in performance, making performance recovery much more difficult and longer to achieve. The decline in performance due to overarousal is more drastic in the catastrophe model than in the simple inverted-U model. As Eric described the National Championships, "Everybody is going out fast...you could be in a hundred fiftieth...at the mile mark. How can you run that and not get discouraged? How can you do that and be thinking about moving up all the time?" A big part of the answer, according to the sport psychology literature and the coaches of this study, is emotional control and the right perspective.

Taylor (1996) lists symptoms of overarousal, or overintensity (as he terms it), including physical reactions such as muscle tension, breathing difficulties, excessive sweating, decreased coordination, and fatigue, and cognitive reactions such as negative self-talk, irrational thoughts, a decrease in motivation, over-narrowing of attention, and fear. To control arousal, Taylor (1996) recommends deep rhythmic breathing, muscle relaxation exercises, such as progressive relaxation, and smiling, which helps blood flow in the brain, helps release neurochemicals that increase relaxation, and makes feeling tense and angry difficult. Also, putting the competition in perspective may be calming. As the coaches of this study suggested, maintaining the perspective that the race is "not the end of the world" may help an athlete control his or her emotions and enjoy the process.

Emotional control also seemed to be related to confidence in this study. For instance, Arthur said about one of his athletes who was faced with adversity moments

before the championship race, "Nothing was going to upset her." Also, Elaine mentioned that one of her athletes fell late in the championship race but got up and finished strongly. These descriptions suggest that championship athletes believe they can succeed despite adversity and this leads to higher levels of perseverance.

Cohesion

The second major theme to emerge from the coaches' interviews was cohesion, which consisted of the subthemes: having a collective mission, being on the same page, blending into a team, and leadership. The creation of a collective mission was felt to be important by the coaches in this study and is promoted in the sport psychology literature. Janssen (1999) encourages establishing a singular, common, overt goal that other goals revolve around. He suggests that the goal should be realistic but challenging enough so that the only way it can be accomplished is through a unified effort. The goal should also be more valuable to the members than the sacrifices required. Gould (2001) states that explicit, measurable, and specific goals are more effective than "do your best" goals because they make it more difficult for individuals to feel successful when their performance is low; when the goal is vague, individuals may give themselves the benefit of the doubt about being successful even if they perform poorly. By doing this, they hinder a realistic evaluation of areas needing improvement.

Several of the coaches in this study claimed that their team's main goal was spoken or written and was specifically to win the National Championships. Coaches discussed how their teams' collective mission involved both outcome and performance goals (see Gould, 2001). The outcome goal was often based on social comparison and

was product oriented (winning the National Championship), whereas, the performance goals focused more on the process (doing the right things, improvement, and learning). For instance, Eric described how his team's goal was to win the National title, but also emphasized commitment, improvement of conditioning, and learning one's best race strategy.

Gould (2001) advocates performance goals because they are flexible and more controllable than outcome goals. For instance, if a team loses several races, they may adjust their performance goals to improve different areas of their race such as attentional focus during the last mile, whereas, if their only goal was an outcome goal of having an undefeated season, this may lead to a decrease in motivation because they have already failed their pursuit. Coaches also talked about having short-term process goals to work on during the season that helped their teams reach their outcome goal of winning the National Championship. As Eric said:

> We went into every race during the season with a particular game plan...learning how to pack up, learning how to go out fast and then settle down, learning how to settle and surge in the middle, and how to extend their kick out further...Then when we get to the end of the season, we say, 'OK, now's (laughing) a race where you can go out fast, surge in the middle, and then kick from a long way away.'

Gould (2001) suggests that short-term goals allow athletes to see immediate improvement, which may help them increase their motivation for long-term goals. Long-term goals may keep motivation high when training is not completely enjoyable and is the main guide for action throughout the season (Yukelson, 1984). Additionally, as the coaches discussed, and as the literature in sport psychology advocates (see Burton, Naylor, & Holliday, 2001 for example), all team members should be involved in the goal

setting process. As Sam stated, "When a coach gives a team a goal, it lacks any kind of power." Carron and Dennis (2001) further advocate that a democratic style of leadership where the athletes help determine their team's goals builds more cohesion than an autocratic style where only the coach creates the goals. The more unified a team is in their goals, the more cohesive they will be (Carron, 1982).

Several of the coaches used the phrase "being on the same page" to describe how athletes knew their team roles, accepted their roles, and consistently performed their roles for the good of the group, which often involved individual sacrifices. This is consistent with Carron and Dennis' (2001) claim that role clarity, role acceptance, and role performance are imperative to group cohesion. According to Carron and Dennis (2001), there are formal roles that are explicitly set out by the group, such as captain, possibly lead runner, or coach, and informal roles that evolve from the interactions in the group. For the coaches of this study, formal roles were important, but informal roles were more emphasized. For instance, as Anne Marie suggested, a team member may be an "encourager," a "prayer partner," or a "vocal leader." The coaches also described how athletes fulfilled informal roles by interacting with teammates during races. As Anne Marie remarked, "If you're together- you're talking, you're encouraging. You're saying, 'Let's go, let's go after so and so.'" Coaches discussed how in a race before Nationals, a faster runner might let up a little to run with another runner with less confidence to "bridge the gap" between the two. Furthermore, the role of social support from teammates that were not in the top seven, who encouraged the top athletes, was

significant. Therefore, as the coaches discussed, every member of a team may have a valuable informal role.

Also, Carron (1982) describes how norms of behavior can increase cohesion. Coaches of this study discussed how this was true. For example, the norm of intense effort during races was significant for team cohesion. As Eric said, "You may not see your teammate, but you got to know they're out there pushing to the limit and if you have any doubts in your head, you have to answer, 'I'm going to push to the limit the same as they are.'" Sam pointed out, "If you are not doing the best that you can…then you are detracting from the rest of the team because it has an effect." Norms of behavior also included lifestyle outside of the sport such as avoiding excessive partying on Saturday night. Mainly, being on the same page involved a unified commitment to the team.

Furthermore, coaches talked about how their cohesive teams had different personalities and egos. In most cases, the members were competitive with each other in competition and in practice, but were together in their goals of training and racing well. As Will pointed out, intra-team competition is beneficial if not exclusively for the ego but for the task of improvement. As he stated, the competition "really helped all of them become better."

The coaches of this study discussed blending different types of individuals into a team. Coaches talked about the importance of having team members care about each other, as when Elaine described how the members of her championship team would "hang out" together and had "really good chemistry."

However, in a study by Weiss and Friedrichs (1986), social support behavior was most predictive of win/loss percentage for collegiate basketball teams, with higher scores of social support being negatively related to winning percentage. Weiss and Freidrichs' (1986) study seems to support Arthur's suggestion that, "Maybe when everything is going great, you don't feel the need to...have a gung-ho relationship." His team may have been extremely successful because they were in the performing stage of group development (Tuckman, 1965) and were focused on the task, or were so individually talented that they could run as individuals and succeed, or a combination of both. Regardless, from the coaches' interviews and the sport psychology literature, task cohesion seems more important to team performance success than social cohesion.

Finally, leadership was emphasized by the coaches as a factor that increased cohesion. Examples were given of vocal and demonstrative leaders. As Murray and Mann (2001) state, leaders must be able to communicate effectively the vision and strategies to attain the vision. Leaders must be able to move followers to transcend their own self-interests for the goals of the group. Coaches mentioned their own leadership but mainly emphasized the leadership of team members. This deference is, again, consistent with the sport psychology literature that states that a democratic leadership style in decision-making builds more cohesion than an autocratic one (see Carron & Dennis, 2001). Therefore, it is not surprising that some of these championship teams developed productive goals under members' leadership, or that a mentoring system, that a couple of the coaches described, worked well.

Talent

The coaches of this study emphasized the talent of their team members. Cross country is largely an individual sport which, according to Steiner's model of group performance (1972), relies more heavily on the resources of each individual rather than the coordination and interaction between members. For instance, Jones (1974) studied team effectiveness and individual performance success in professional baseball, basketball, and tennis teams and found the strongest relationship between these factors for baseball, and the weakest for basketball. Jones suggests that this was due to fewer interactions and less team coordination involved in baseball compared to basketball. Therefore, although cross country involves interaction and cooperation with pack running or gauging pace off of a teammate, individual ability is still a paramount factor for team success.

It also was significant that the coaches talked about the latent talent of their athletes. As coaches described, athletes were often from small towns, played other sports, and/or did not run many miles in high school. Thus, they may not have gotten enough competition or training to bloom as high school runners. It was also interesting that Anne Marie distinguished good cross country runners who could handle hills, contact and weather, from good track runners who were more efficient, slight of build and not as strong, and therefore, struggled in cross country. Hence, there may be runners who have talent for track, but not as much for cross country, dependent on their mental and physical make-up.

Development

Development was the last major theme emerging from coaches' interviews and consisted of the subthemes: an outstanding team performance at Nationals, development as runners, development as people, and development of fun and satisfaction. The outstanding team performance was expressed as, "things all fell into place just the right way," "everything came together on the right date," and "it takes a certain amount of luck." Vealey (1986) characterized situational favorableness as the feeling that the breaks are in your favor. The coaches of this study certainly described the feeling that the breaks largely went their team's way on the championship race day.

It was significant for the coaches that the athletes developed as people. "Learning life's lessons," "preparing you for life," "teaching them it's a balance," "working with people," and "self-confidence and strength inside" were statements made by the coaches that showed that the sport was part of the college educational and maturation process. Furthermore, Will discussed how sport motivated some of his athletes to go to college and graduate. This is an example of positive extrinsic motivation (Vallerand & Rouseau, 2001). Going to school was still a means to an end, to be able to run; however, as a result athletes got a valuable education and even became more interested in a field of study.

Finally, the coaches talked about how much fun and satisfying the whole season was for them, much more so than about the successful outcome. The storming stage of group development (Tuckman, 1965) was not figural for any of the coaches. Will noted that his team had "one big flair-up during one practice because it just became a little too competitive. So we had to had to chew 'em out about it. They were chewing each other

out...And they were ticked at each other for about a day (laughing)." Therefore, they quickly worked through the conflict and, like the other teams, cooperated and had a high degree of task production, which according to Elaine, is the experience of "just rollin'."

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to bring to light coaches' experience of NCAA Division III National Championship cross-country teams. An understanding of these successful teams and their coaches was sought. From my bracketing interview, themes of experience, roles, connection with teammates and coach, a common goal, sacrifices, confidence, enjoyment, leadership, tradition, and sharing hard work emerged. All of these topics arose in the coaches' interviews. However, tradition was not as significant as expected. It seemed that it was important how the team performed a year or two prior, but not much beyond that. One might call this tangible tradition because most of the team members had a first hand experience of the success. The success of a program several years back is probably not as influential. In fact, as Arthur commented:

> Sometimes they get upset if I mention how good we used to be, like I'm putting them down or something...You have to just concentrate on them improving. They have to believe in themselves. You have to have a break once in awhile, a couple of runners who are competitive.

Interestingly, the type of workouts done or the physiology of the workouts was not discussed in my bracketing interview nor in the coaches' interviews. The coaches all had an excellent understanding of the physiological concepts of training; however, it seemed to be the effort and confidence they put into the workouts that made them effective. As Sam stated, "There's physiological benefit [to the workouts], but more important, it's a mind-set. As you practice, so you will run meets. If you're going fifty

percent at practice, or seventy-five, I guarantee it's going to carry over to the race situations because you are going to stay in the comfort zone, you are not able to challenge yourself. You *got* to challenge yourself." And as Eric said, "A big part of peaking is having confidence that you are peaked...because I could have done four or five, ten, or I don't know how many different workouts with the same results." These coaches concluded their interviews with the similar statements, "So there is a lot more than the x's and o's of putting together the workouts, that's for sure," and, "Those combinations. If you have that, you are going to be successful. I don't care what you do for the workout, how much rest you take between intervals, or number of intervals you do."

Two themes emerged from the coaches' interviews that I did not expect, based on my bracketing interview. I did not discuss competitiveness as figural to my experience of a National Championship cross country team as an athlete, perhaps because I felt my coach de-emphasized it or I took it for granted that all collegiate athletes are competitive. Also, I did not discuss how my teammates and I developed as people, perhaps because I was absorbed in the process and had not thought as globally or as long-range as the coaches of this study.

Attitude, *cohesion*, *talent*, and *development* were the major themes that stood out for these coaches about their most successful National Championship cross country teams. Hopefully, from their descriptions, the reader learned about the experience and found applicable information.

Recommendations for Coaches and Sport Psychology Consultants

Based on the coaches' descriptions of their most successful National Championship teams, here are twelve recommendations for coaches and sport psychology consultants:

1. Promote self-motivation (Deci, 1972). Encourage athletes to lead the goal setting process and to take initiatives in their own training.

2. In creating goals, encourage specific, measurable, realistic, and challenging goals (Gould, 2001). Also, guide the development of short term, long term, process, outcome, individual, and team goals.

3. Foster competitiveness, more for team improvement, enjoyment, and achievement, than for the ego oriented goal of beating others. However, keep in mind that ego orientation and social comparison are motivators for athletes (Duda & Treasure, 2001). Satisfying both these needs may be advantageous.

4. Implement several methods to increase self-efficacy/sport confidence (Bandura, 1977; Vealey, 1986). For instance, to increase environmental comfort, run the championship course at least once before the championship race, run in challenging meets leading up to Nationals, and encourage athletes to visualize the course. To enhance past performance, possibly run in less difficult meets early in the season to experience success. Also, know that running in the National Championships in previous years is a significant advantage. Finally, to emphasize vicarious experiences, discuss how past runners in the program succeeded and perhaps show a video of their successful performance. Also, encourage returning athletes not competing in the National

Championships to go to the race, prepare for, and closely watch the race as if they were in it.

5. Monitor emotional arousal, especially that of individuals who are ego oriented (Nicholls, 1989). Emphasize athletes' competencies, what they can control, and keeping sport in perspective. Also, model emotional/control and perspective.

6. Emphasize acceptance and appreciation of different members on the team. Promote the idea that it is not necessary to be best friends (social cohesion) in order to all work together effectively (task cohesion) (Carron, 1982; Lenk, 1977).

7. Highlight the value and variance of roles that members of the team may fill. Emphasize that every member either contributes to or contaminates the team (Carron, 1982).

8. Work on the interactive facets of racing like pack running, talking with each other, and having a faster runner perhaps let up in a race to run with a teammate who needs a boost of confidence.

9. Make sure that team members are on the same page. Guide role clarification, acceptance, and performance. Also, guide the behavioral norms adopted for competition, practice, and lifestyle (Carron, 1982).

10. Provide opportunities and encouragement for athlete leadership- in meetings, with a mentoring system, and through demonstration in practices and meets.

11. Recruit talent. However, be aware of the latent talent of runners from small schools, those who have played other sports, and those who have not run many miles.

12. Work out team conflict as early as possible to get to the most productive stage of team development, the performance stage (Tuckman, 1965). Furthermore, realize that the teams evolve through a process; they are not simply put together. All of the teams described in this study either won the National Championship or were second the year before their most successful National Championship team.

Suggestions for Future Researchers

The following suggestions are offered for future research:

1. Examine athletes' perceptions of their championship team experience and compare their perceptions with those of their coaches'. How attuned would coaches be in understanding individual team members and how the members related to each other?

2. Investigate coaches' experiences of having several low performing teams. How would they describe their teams? How would their outlook differ from those of championship coaches?

3. Compare NCAA Division I National Championship coaches' perceptions of their teams with those of Division III coaches. It would be interesting to see if different philosophies would be reflected in coaches' responses. For instance, would Division I coaches emphasize educational goals of sport as much as Division III coaches?

4. Ask coaches to describe their favorite, most memorable, or most successful teams. In this study, I selected the teams coaches were asked to discuss. Perhaps coaches would not rate their most successfully performing team as their favorite or most successful team. What characteristics would teams possess that would make them a coach's favorite or most memorable?

5. Focus on the question: "What was the National Championship coaching experience like for *you?"* Instead of an emphasis on describing the team, concentrate more on the experience of coaching. Examples of probes could be: "What was that like for you?" and, "Could you tell me more about your reaction to…?" (see Dale, 1996).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Hi my name is Colin Young. I am a graduate student in the Cultural Studies Department at the University of Tennessee. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine characteristics of NCAA Division III National Champion teams as perceived by the coaches of those teams.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form, complete a background questionnaire, and mail both back to me in a self-addressed stamped envelope. You will also participate in a 30-45 minute interview. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed.

The study may help clarify the characteristics of successful cross-country teams. The results may help other coaches, athletes, and sport psychologists learn more about the factors that characterize champion teams.

The information in the study will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet in 144 HPER Bldg. at the University of Tennessee for 3 years past the completion of this study and will be made available only to persons involved in the study. A pseudonym will be assigned to each participant. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact me at colinyoung17@hotmail.com, at 144 HPER Bldg. University of Tennessee Knoxville, TN 37996-2700, or at (865) 974-8768. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Research Compliance Services section of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate and may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned or destroyed.

Sincerely,

Colin F. Young
144 HPER Bldg.
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996-2700
(865) 974-8768
colinyoung17@hotmail.com

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

I acknowledge that the research procedures described on the attached form have been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been informed of all the procedures in the study. I know that I may ask now, or in the future, any questions I have about the study or the research procedures. I have been assured that records relating to me will be kept confidential and stored in a locked file cabinet in 144 HPER Bldg. at the University of Tennessee for three years past the completion of the study. I know that no information will be released or printed that would disclose my personal identity without my permission. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time.

_____ _____

(Signature of Participant) (Name of Participant)

_____

(Date)

Colin Young
144 HPER Bldg.
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996-2700
(865) 974-8768
colinyoung17@hotmail.com

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background Questions:

1. Where are you from?

2. How long have you been coaching?

3. Would you please briefly describe your education (i.e., undergraduate, graduate, post-college certification)?

4. Would you please briefly describe your competitive running experience?

5. Are you married? If so, how long?

6. Do you have any children? If so, what are their ages?

7. How old were you when you coached the (year) team?

8. Did you have other responsibilities while coaching this team (i.e., teaching, another occupation)?

9. How many hours per day did you spend in coaching related activities for this team?

Main Question:

What especially stands out to you about your most successful National Championship team?

APPENDIX D

CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

I acknowledge that the information discussed in this research group is confidential. I will not disclose this information without the consent of the interviewer and the participants.

_____ _____

(Signature of Research Group Member) (Name of Research Group Member)

_____

(Date)

VITA

Colin Fisher Young was born in Naperville, Illinois on July 4, 1976. He graduated from Naperville North High School in June 1995. He attended Duke University in Durham, North Carolina for two years before transferring to North Central College in Naperville, IL in the fall of 1997. He graduated with majors in History and Physical Education with a minor in Psychology in June of 2000.

After graduating, Colin moved to Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania to concentrate on distance running. He was also a volunteer assistant track coach at Elizabethtown College. In the fall of 2001, he began his graduate studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He will receive his Master of Science degree in Human Performance and Sport Studies with an emphasis in Sport Psychology in December 2002.

Currently, Colin is a volunteer assistant cross country and track coach for UT. He is pursuing a Ph.D. degree in Education with an emphasis in Socio-Cultural Foundations of Sport and Education and plans to graduate in August 2005. His future professional goals include: teaching, writing, and being a collegiate head cross country and track coach.