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Official youth soccer club philosophies: experiences of coaches, players, and parents

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Ithaca College
Graduate Program in Exercise & Sport Sciences
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER OF SCIENCE THESIS

This is to certify that the thesis of

Nathan Bell

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Science in the School of
Health Sciences and Human Performance
at Ithaca College has been approved.

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OFFICIAL YOUTH SOCCER
CLUB PHILOSOPHIES:
EXPERIENCES OF COACHES,
PLAYERS, AND PARENTS

A Masters Thesis presented to the Faculty of the
Graduate Program in Exercise and Sport Sciences
Ithaca College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Science

By
Nathan Bell
May 2014

ABSTRACT

In the United States, millions of children play soccer for youth soccer clubs. These clubs provide children the opportunity to exercise, compete, enjoy the company of peers, and develop skills (Côté, Fraser-Thomas, & Deakin, 2008). Yet, while many youth soccer clubs have developmental philosophies, the degree to which these philosophies are actually implemented by club coaches is unknown.

Since there are many variables involved in the training of a youth soccer player, from coaching philosophies (Carless & Douglass, 2011) and coaching practices (Mouratidis, 2010; Olympiou, Jowett & Dudu, 2008), to athlete's sporting experiences (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009; Wankel & Kreisel, 1985) and the climate of the club as a whole (Holt & Dunn, 2004), the relationship between these factors is important for anyone involved in creating a youth soccer experience.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether there is congruence between 1) the stated philosophy of the club, 2) implementation of this philosophy by coaches and 3) experiences of players and their parents. Coaches ($n = 3$) from a youth soccer club in the Northeast United States, as well as players ($n = 4$) and parents ($n = 4$) from the same club took part in semi-structured interviews to determine the club's implementation of their official club philosophy.

Results were determined by content analysis. This analysis resulted in the higher order themes of "professional coaching," "soccer specific training," and "professional organization." Eight lower order themes related to the club's "physical environment," "atmosphere," "administration," "style of play," "practice characteristics," "coaching development," "coaching climate," and "coach characteristics."

These themes were related back to the club’s official philosophy. Out of the eight lower-order themes, six were found in the official philosophy. Themes not found in the official philosophy were “physical environment” and “coach characteristics.” The club philosophy mentioned the importance of the premier level leagues that the club in a part of. However, no themes relating to the club’s status as a member of a select league emerged.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to Richard Swanson, whose memory will live on with those who love the Beautiful Game and the game's power to transform lives.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, millions of children play soccer for youth soccer clubs. These clubs provide children the opportunity to exercise, compete, enjoy the company of peers, and develop skills (Côté, Fraser-Thomas, & Deakin, 2008). Common among athletes who claim to have had good youth sporting experiences was a sense of challenge, meaningful adult and peer relationships, a sense of community, and the development of communication and coping skills (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2009). Also part of the experience for those who had good youth sport experiences were open communication from parents and coaches, a knowledge of the club's developmental philosophy, and the support of school friends and siblings (Côté et al., 2008).

However, while sports provide the potential for a positive experience that is developmental, what many children truly experience is actually negative. Overall, athletes with negative sporting experiences have commented on poor coach relationships, negative peer influences, parent pressure, and a stressful game-time environment (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2009). Additionally, athletes with negative experiences tended not to have had significant one-on-one time with coaches, but did have rivalries with siblings or peers (Côté et al., 2008).

In order to ensure that players have positive youth soccer experiences, almost all youth soccer clubs have crafted a club developmental philosophy that is supposed to guide all of their work with young athletes. These philosophies are often based off of the most successful professional soccer academies--Ajax, Barcelona, and Arsenal. All three of these renowned professional academies have philosophies of long-term player

development that have been shown to be enacted through their coaches and administrative staff (Draper, 2010; Longman, 2010; Sokolove, 2010). Included in their philosophies are enough hours of practice for players to become expert (Ericson, 1993), an acknowledgement of the unique needs of children of different ages (Côté, 1999), and autonomy-supporting coaching behaviors (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Yet, while many youth soccer clubs emulate these successful professional academies and have philosophies that mirror their professional counterparts, the degree to which these philosophies are actually implemented by club coaches is unknown.

A club's official philosophy serves the purpose of setting guidelines for the club's activities. These guidelines exist to ensure that there is consistency throughout the soccer program and in the positive athletic experience that the club seeks to provide. It follows that the degree to which an official philosophy is implemented relates to the quality of the experience it offers its members. Usually, clubs are judged by how successful they are at producing professional or college level players. However, another important measure of their success that is often forgotten is the actual experiences of the people impacted by their prolonged involvement with this institution. Because clubs often have club philosophies that emphasize development both on and off the field, clubs should be assessed both by the players they produce and the quality of the experience they provide. Sport psychology literature shows that the quality of athlete experience is closely related to coaching philosophies (Bennie, 2010) and coaching practices (Mouratidis, 2010). Yet, no study has looked comprehensively at the relationship between coaching philosophies and practices and the experiences of players and their parents.

Since official club philosophies are common throughout youth soccer, it is worth further exploring these philosophies. If there is a link between the implementation of these philosophies and the athletic experiences of players, then this study will have provided a rationale for additional studies that look at the specific conventions that aid in implementation of club philosophies.

In order to examine the link between implementation of club philosophies and the experience of players this study will investigate whether there is congruence between 1) the stated philosophy of the club, 2) implementation of this philosophy by coaches, and 3) experiences of players and their parents.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether there is congruence among 1) a youth soccer club's official philosophy, 2) the implementation of this philosophy by club coaches, and 3) the experiences of club players and their parents.

Research Questions

The following research questions were examined:

- 1) Is there a contrast between the official club philosophy and coaches' understanding of this philosophy?
- 2) Is there a contrast between the official club philosophy and coaches' implementation of this philosophy?
- 3) Are there common themes found in the descriptions of their experiences by coaches, players and parents?
- 4) How do these themes contrast with the club's official philosophy?

5) What do these themes tell us about the club and the development experience they provide?

Hypothesis

There will be a difference between the club's official philosophy and themes that emerge from the description of coaches', players', and parents' experiences.

Significance of the Study

Since there are many variables involved in the training of a youth soccer player, from coaching philosophies (Carless & Douglass, 2011) and coaching practices (Mouratidis, 2010; Olympiou, Jowett & Dudu, 2008), to athlete's sporting experiences (Strachan, Côté & Deakin, 2009; Wankel & Kreisel, 1985) and the climate of the club as a whole (Holt & Dunn, 2004), the relationship between these factors is important for anyone involved in creating a youth soccer experience. Because this study will address all of these factors and their impact on the actual experiences of players and their parents, this study will be significant for parents of youth soccer players, youth soccer players, coaches, directors of coaching and, club board members. This study will also be interesting for US Soccer officials in charge of setting the guidelines that clubs are supposed to follow. US Soccer has set many guidelines, but there has been only marginal implementation of these guidelines by American youth soccer clubs. This study aims to explore whether even within one club, the official club philosophy is implemented. It will also be significant for sport psychology consultants and business consultants who work with sports organizations (Albert, Cornelius, Van Raalte & Jones, 2005; Côté, 1999; Harwood, 2010).

Definition of Terms

Coaching Philosophy: is “a set of principles that guide an individual’s practice.”
(Carless & Douglass, 2011)

Positive Experiences: “growth experiences in six key areas: (a) exploration and identity, (b) initiative, (c) self-regulation, (d) peer relationships, (e) teamwork and social skills, and (f) adult networks and social capital” (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2009).

Negative Experiences: “experiences related to a) increased aggression, b) stress, c) dropout, d) burnout, and e) low morality reasoning and self-esteem” (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2009).

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study are as follows:

- 1) Only coaches who had been with the club for more than a year were interviewed.
- 2) Only players who had been with the club for more than two years were interviewed.
- 3) Only parents whose child is also participating in the study were interviewed.

Limitations

The limitations of the study are as follows:

- 1) All of the participants are from one club. Potentially, this club does not accurately represent other clubs.
- 2) The mood of the participants fluctuates. Their mood and feelings about training may be different on other days.
- 3) Due to the use of qualitative methods, the results are not directly generalizable to other clubs.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While many studies examine coaching philosophies (Bennie, 2010; Carless & Douglass, 2011), coaching practices (Almagro et al., 2010; Boixados et al., 2004; Mouratidis, 2010; Olympiou, Jowett & Dudu, 2008), and athlete's sporting experiences (Côté, Fraser-Thomas & Deakin, 2008; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2009; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009; Wankel & Kreisel, 1985), no study has examined the interaction between all three components. This is surprising since all three aspects youth sports create a symbiotic unit. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the congruence between a club's official coaching philosophy, the implementation of this philosophy by coaches, and the experiences of players. The following provides an overview of the existing literature on soccer organizations, athlete's positive and negative sports experiences, and coaching styles.

Soccer Club Organization

Youth soccer clubs provide training and development to kids of varying abilities (Kelley, 2006). In addition to developing athletically, parents expect their children to develop socially and emotionally as a result of their participation in athletics (Albert et al., 2005). In America, most soccer clubs are supported by dues paid by families, while throughout the rest of the world, professional teams provide fully funded academies, which train a few select players (Draper, 2010). In return, the professional clubs from around the world get to sign the academy players with the goal of one day integrating them into the first team. These players are often sold to other teams, with many clubs basing their business models around the sale of players (Sokolove, 2010).

Some clubs with successful academies, such as Ajax in Holland and Porto in Portugal, finance nearly all of their business operations by selling players, making more money from selling players than from their television and ticket revenue. Arsenal and Barcelona produce world-class players sometimes valued at more than 100 million US dollars, but rather than selling these players once they enter their prime, these bigger clubs usually hold onto the players they produce. This plan ensures a competitive, cohesive squad that is inexpensive to create. Since transfers are an important component to each team's balance book and potentially lucrative (or costly), each team places a great emphasis on perfecting their academy to create the ideal climate for the development of professional players (Longman, 2011).

Sokolove (2010), in an article for the New York Times, was given access to the notable Ajax Soccer academy. He writes about the different components of the academy, and the great number of players, coaches, administrators, parents and staff members involved in the development of each professional player. In May, at the end of each year, there is a selection process during which each player is reviewed and assessed. Those that do not make the grade are dropped from Ajax, and replaced by new players from outside. If a new player on trial is judged to be better than a player on Ajax, regardless of the number of years the player has been in the Ajax system, that old player will be dropped. Those players who have stayed in Ajax from a youth until the pro ranks (usually 18 years old) have undergone about a dozen years of selection pressure and interruptions to friendships (Sokolove, 2010). Many aspiring young soccer players dream of playing for a big club in Europe; however, these kids are usually not cognizant of the challenges and stressors that the elite performer endures.

Longman (2011) was given similar access to La Masia, the academy of FC Barcelona, arguably the top soccer academy in the world. He tells of similar selection pressures and relationship complexity as was found at Ajax. However, Barcelona takes care to educate their players for a life outside of soccer, mitigating some of the stress that comes with not making the grade. He writes,

During the week, they rise at 6:45 a.m., eat breakfast and leave for regular school in the city at 7:30. They attend classes from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., return to La Masia to eat, rest and attend mandatory study groups. Training is held from 7 to 8:45 p.m., followed by dinner and some free time. Lights out for the younger players is 10:30 p.m., 11 for older players... Each player living at the academy is provided a laptop computer. On staff are cooks, nutritionists, a doctor, a psychologist, tutors and social directors who take the players on outings around the city.” (p. 1).

Arsenal, based in London, is the only other academy to produce a comparable level of talent to Ajax and Barcelona (Barlow, 2009). Like Ajax and Barcelona, they have a dormitory, school set-up, and employees who aid the players in domestic, scholastic and athletic domains (Barlow 2009).

Barcelona, Ajax, and Arsenal are all renowned for a distinctive attacking style of play and a club emphasis on promoting from within their academies. They are also all known for club philosophies of playing a 4-3-3 style, incorporating former players into their coaching staffs, and high levels of social integration between the first team and the academy players (Barlow, 2009; Longman, 2011; Sokolove, 2010). This integration and support of developing players is described best by Barcelona’s official slogan, “Mes que un club” (More Than a Club).

Due to these clubs' successes in developing players, coaches and technical directors from around the world have visited the facilities of Ajax, Arsenal and Barcelona to learn their secrets. Central to the success of these clubs is the support that they provide to youth players (Longman, 2011, Sokolove, 2010). Visiting coaches have shared this knowledge, which has filtered down first to other professional academies, and then to amateur clubs. The knowledge of successful development programs has prompted most clubs and academies--from amateur to professional--to create club philosophies that include player development both on and off the field (Carless & Douglass, 2011).

These official club philosophies have come to prominence both as a way to market the club to potential players and parents and to guide the club's functioning. Many philosophies incorporate the ideas of player support and personal development (Bennie, 2010). Besides providing marketing and guiding the club's functioning, these philosophies set out the positive athletic experience that clubs aim to provide their players.

The majority of research in developmental practices takes place at the elite level (Albert et al, 2005; Barker, Jones & Greenlees, 2011, Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Roemer 1993; Howard 2008). But out of the hundreds of million youth soccer players around the world, only a tiny percentage will go on to professional careers in soccer. Yet most of these kids should still be positively affected by their youth soccer experiences since clubs often have official philosophies that aim to develop young players both on and off the field. However, though many amateur clubs have official philosophies inspired by the top professional clubs, the experiences of athletes often do not match these official philosophies.

Those studies that investigate amateur clubs focus either on the club's developmental policies (Harwood, 2009; Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Van Yperen, 2009) or the experience and individual development of the player (Vernacchia, McGuire & Reardon, 2010; Wankel & Kreisel, 1985; Weiss & Smith, 1996). Research on the interaction between the club and the club's consumers, the players and parents, is particularly important because of the dependent nature of their relationship (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Missing is an investigation of the congruence between amateur club philosophies with both the club's development practices and the experiences of the athletes and parents.

Usually, clubs are judged by how successful they are at producing professional or college level players. However, another important measure of their success that is often forgotten is the quality of the actual experiences of the people impacted by their prolonged involvement with this institution. Because clubs often have philosophies that emphasize development both on and off the field, clubs should be assessed both by the players they produce and the quality of the experience they provide.

Talent Development

Most official club philosophies make reference to the development of the player and the manner in which the club will aid in this development. Yet the path is long and winding for a talented young soccer player who aspires to one day become a professional. When special athletic ability is discovered in a child, parents have to make decisions about how to support and grow this talent (Strachan et al, 2009). What does that family value? Do the parents emphasize being well-rounded-playing instruments, learning another language, or playing multiple sports-or does that family favor mastering one

hobby? Does the family have the means or desire to commit large amounts of time and money to one child's athletic development?

Some parents think that the best path to an elite level is by specializing in one sport. However, the developmental model that Côté (2009) lays out suggests that the risks with early specialization outweigh the benefits. Specialization in one sport before the age of twelve and characterized by deliberate practice and a lack of play - may lead to expert performance, but is also strongly linked to burnout and high levels of stress (Côté, 2009). Instead, until the age of 12, a sampling phase during which the athlete plays multiple sports and takes part in deliberate play is advisable (Côté, 2009). Côté (2009) argues that sampling multiple sports provides the athlete with different social environments and a range of motor and cognitive experience. Strachan (2009) points out that another benefit of the sampling phase is that for those who never become professionals—most athletes—their love of the sport is retained. Many of these kids may grow up to coach, referee, or volunteer in the future (Strachan et al., 2009). Soberlak (2003), interviewed four 20 year old elite hockey players about each year of their development and found support for Côté's three stages of development: the sampling (ages 6-12), the specialization (ages 13-15), and the investment (ages 16+) years (Soberlak, 2003). These findings are important because they inform the manner in which soccer coaches should train players of different ages. During the sampling phase, the emphasis should be on fun, motor skills and skill development, while during the investment phase, tactics and fitness must be trained (Harwood, 2010).

In order to reach an expert level, it is not only that athlete who must make sacrifices (Côté, 1999). The family of the athlete will spend a great deal of time and

money ferrying the player to practices and games, missing out on social opportunities and making career sacrifices (Côté, 1999). Sometimes, resources are diverted from another child in order to better the opportunity of the talented athlete. All of this attention and time commitment creates stress and conflict within the family (Côté, 1999).

Unfortunately, parents can also create a great deal of stress for their children, even pushing them so hard that the sport loses all of its fun (Harwood, 2009; 2010). Yet, without the support of their parents, the athlete has little chance to become an expert (Côté, 1999). It is clear that in predicting and planning development, assessors and trainers must be aware that the context within which the athlete resides will play a large role (Henriksen et al., 2009; Wolfenden & Holt, 2004) and if the club is serious about developing talent, then they should provide support to help the athlete balance the many competing pressures (Harwood, 2010). Barcelona, the club on which many official youth soccer club philosophies are based, employs a large support staff (Longman, 2011) and works hard to provide the support that is dictated in their philosophy. While most clubs cannot afford the staff of Barcelona, other methods of support are possible. Such examples of this support system could be in the form of mentorship with an older player and counseling from coaches (Vella, 2011).

Much debate has centered on the question of whether professional players are expert at their sport because of innate talent or time spent practicing. Though innate talent (which is hard to measure) plays some role, the link between expert performance and deliberate practice has been studied and proven (Ericsson et al., 1993). The authors claim that for an athlete to reach an elite level, they have to spend at least 10,000 hours with a regimen of deliberate practice. Ericsson (1993) defines deliberate practice as

practice activities set by instructors. He also states that even the differences between experts can mostly be attributed to the amount of time they practice. However, when Barker (2003) reviewed the history of expert decision makers in hockey, netball and basketball, he found that playing an additional sport reduced the number of hours it took to become expert decision makers (Barker et al, 2003). In particular, unstructured play has been found to have a profound effect on the creativity of young athletes (Memmert et al., 2010). Players' creativity, as measured by ratings from coaches, was correlated with the amount of time they spent in unstructured play activities (Memmert et al., 2010).

In addition to the development of physical skills, the development of mental and life skills is incorporated in many youth soccer club philosophies. In a study on the application of psychosocial skill development within a soccer academy, Alfermann and colleagues (2012) found that the most important explicit psychosocial skills are motivation, self-awareness and the ability to work hard. Other useful psychosocial skills were managing performance and process outcomes, the ability to utilize team skills, and general social skills. The study found that though that the environment expects the young players to display these skills, they are only indirectly practiced (Alfermann, Larsen, & Christensen, 2012).

Although many studies have explored what it takes for an individual to develop to an elite level, not enough attention has been given to organization context. The large body of literature focuses on the stages of athletic development and the strong relationship between hours of practice and eminence. Few studies have investigated the link between athletic development and the experiences they had in the organization within which they developed. Surely 10,000 hours of practice with an expert coach will

have a much different result than 10,000 hours with a novice coach. Similarly, 10,000 hours spent in a hostile environment will have a much different effect than 10,000 hours spent in a positive environment (Richardson, Gilbourne, & Littlewood, 2004).

Those studies that investigated the relationship between athletic development and organizational context focused solely on the player's experience of training and the effect of sport psychology interventions (Barker, 2003; Curan et al., 2011; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005) or the manner in which the sporting institution is organized and the way in which institution employees work with athletes (Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010; Harwood, 2010; Henriksen et al., 2009). Since the player, their parents, and the academy form one symbiotic unit, there is a need for more talent development studies that examine both development programs and the experiences that athletes and their parents have participating in the studied programs.

Athlete Experiences

Positive Experiences

Parents often place their children on sports teams as a way to promote their children's psychosocial development. Clubs mention in the club philosophy the positive experience that athletes will gain through the athlete's involvement in the program. Research has shown that involvement on an athletic team is an effective way to make friends, especially for children (Bigelow, Lewko & Salhani, 1989; Weiss & Smith, 1996). Allen (2003) researched the motivation for sport involvement of 100 children and found that their motivation was primarily social. The other factors that were most important for kid's enjoyment of sport were those that were intrinsic to the game, such as excitement of the sport, personal accomplishment, improving one's skills, and testing skills against

others (Wankel & Kreisel, 1985). Less important, however, were the outcome-oriented factors such as pleasing others, winning rewards, and winning the game (Wankel & Kreisel, 1985).

Also, the climate of the team within which they play also has a large impact on the enjoyment and attrition of young players. Fry (2010) examined the perceptions of 184 youth soccer players in a community league. Results revealed that the players who perceived a caring climate on their team were more likely to report higher enjoyment, more positive attitudes towards their coaches and teammates, greater commitment to soccer, and engage in more caring behaviors towards their coaches and teammates. A caring team climate is linked not just to athlete enjoyment, but also to commitment to the sport. This means a caring team climate is important not just in the subjective realm of positive youth development, but also in the objective domain of talent development.

A caring climate is largely related to the behavior of the team's coach. Vella (2011) interviewed 22 coaches regarding each coach's role in youth development. The author aimed to investigate whether there was consistency between the positive youth development literature and the experiences of coaches on the ground doing the work. The coaches' responses centered around eight themes, all of which are supported by the positive youth development literature: competence, confidence, connection, character, life skills, climate, positive affect and, positive psychological capacities. These themes are present in many of the official youth soccer club philosophies. However, it is one thing for coaches to understand what children need to have a positive sporting experience and another for them to actually play a role in creating an environment that provides this experience.

In addition to providing exercise, sports play a large role in youth culture because they teach skills that apply to the rest of life (Albert et al., 2005). Soccer is fast moving and has specific pressures on the athlete (Thelwell, 2005). Thelwell (2005) interviewed soccer players in order to designate the qualities that are possessed by the mentally tough soccer player. Mental toughness in soccer was defined as the ability to persist and refuse to give in, overcome setbacks and poor performances, cope with excessive pressure and to not let adverse situations affect performance. Mentally tough soccer players are committed and determined, motivated and controlled, excellent at concentrating and focusing abilities and full of confidence and self-belief (Thelwell, 2005). Many of these qualities are also present in successful people outside of the sporting domain. The acquisition of these positive mental qualities is seen by many parents as the primary value of youth sports (Albert et al., 2005).

Common themes emerge when athletes are asked about their positive sports experiences. Côté (2009) interviewed 22 adolescent swimmers regarding their sports experiences. The interviews were broken into themes and meaning units. Common among athletes who claimed to have had good youth sporting experiences was a feeling that they had gained a sense of challenge, meaningful adult and peer relationships, a sense of community, and the development of communication and coping skills (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2009). Also part of the experience for those who had good experiences were open communication from parents and coaches, knowledge of the club's developmental philosophy, and the support of school friends and siblings (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2008). Sports have the capability of teaching important lessons that children can take with them away from the sporting arena and into the rest of their lives. In order for

an athlete to have an overall positive sporting experience, they must have caring, positive relationships with their teammates, their families and most importantly, their coaches.

Since the quality of children's sporting experience are greatly determined not only by the climate present within the team, but also the climate of the larger sporting organization, it would be instructive to investigate the climate of youth soccer clubs more thoroughly. Using the established findings of the positive youth sporting experience literature, we can assess whether clubs provide an experience that matches these findings.

Negative Experiences

Though sports have the capacity to contribute positively to the overall development of a child, there is equal capacity to do harm (Strachan et al., 2009). Many organizations are so focused on the goal of making money or increasing the club's stature that they forget that real harm can be done to impressionable children. Overall, athletes with negative sporting experiences have commented on poor coach relationships, negative peer influences, parental pressure, and a stressful game-time environment (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2009). Additionally, athletes with negative experiences tended not to have had significant one on one time with coaches, and had rivalries with siblings or peers (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2008).

Sokolove (2010), in his article about the Ajax academy for the New York Times, quotes one fifteen year old who said, "My best friend left two years ago. I don't speak to him anymore. He thought I was not in touch enough, that I was not supporting him. He was furious. I realized he was just a football friend and that you can't have real friends at Ajax." In a competitive climate where each player's spot on the team is at stake, there is the potential for jealousy and a feeling of betrayal. Sports teams have the capacity to

bring people closer, but also to create intra-team competition that can make relationships difficult (Boixados et al., 2004). This competition for playing time may hinder the creation of ongoing relationships within a team.

In addition to the stressors of poor coach relationships, negative peer influences, parental pressure, and a stressful game-time environment, players may also become stressed due to a fear of failure. Sagar and colleagues (2010) defined fear of failure as the tendency to appraise threat to the achievement of personally meaningful goals when one fails in the performance. He suggests that failure is perceived as threatening, and feared, by individuals who associate it with aversive consequences. Another model proposes five beliefs about the consequences of failure that are associated with threat appraisal and feared: fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment, fear of devaluing one's self-estimate, fear of having an uncertain future, fear of important others losing interest, and fear of upsetting important others (Conroy, Poczwadowski, & Henschen, 2001). To measure fear of failure, Sagar and colleagues (2010) conducted a survey with 81 male adolescent (16-18) soccer players in English soccer academies. The replies of the players showed that they perceived failure to affect not only their performance on the field, but also their self-esteem and their place within the team.

Part of the reason that fear of failure is so widespread is that sport is an important achievement domain. Fear of failure affects more in a player's life than just his place in the team the next year. Players also feared a loss of esteem from people they valued: parents, coaches, teammates, and friends (Sagar et al., 2007). Interviews with elite English soccer academy players aged fourteen to seventeen revealed the perceived consequences of failure to be a diminished perception of self, no sense of achievement,

and an emotional cost of failure (Sagar et al., 2007). While many clubs around the world have copied the training styles of Arsenal and Barcelona, most copy only these club's physical training practices. The social and psychological support that these clubs provide is a key to their success, especially because these measures reduce an athlete's fear of failure.

Since stress is not just felt by players, but also by the coaches, successful clubs provide structures that support both the players and the coaches. The amount of stress felt by coaches and the manner in which they cope with this stress affects their players (Olusoga et al., 2010). Youth players are sensitive to the adults around them, especially their coaches and parents (Harwood, 2010). Harwood led a focus group with 41 parents of players in English professional soccer academies. He divided the data into four dimensions of parental stressors: academy processes and quality of communication, match-related factors, sport-family role conflict, school support and education issues. The biggest individual stressor was the uncertainty of their sons' retention and the quality of communication of the academy (Harwood, 2010). The author suggests that academies could reduce stress on parents and players by improving the quality of communication with parents and by clearly outlining expectations. Clubs may not realize that by having unclear communication with parents, they are adding stress to the parents, which gets transferred to the player. Communication with parents is another chance for an organization to reduce stress on players and support the development of the player.

These findings validate the sentiment that is common in the public: there is too much stress in youth sports. From obsessive parents and screaming coaches to preferred teammates and jealous siblings, there are many pitfalls to a rewarding youth sporting

experience. Because sport and competition are intimately connected and because competition leads to most of the negative experiences, as well as many of the good experiences, great attention must be given by the adults in charge to ensure the quality of the experience for kids. If players have negative experiences playing at a club with an official club philosophy that is supposed to ensure the sporting development and emotional well-being of players, then it is worth looking into whether this philosophy is actually being implemented.

Coaching Style

Many youth soccer club philosophies incorporate expectations regarding coaching behaviors and coaching styles. More than peers, teammates, parents or specific sport, coaches have the greatest impact on the youth athlete's sporting enjoyment (Albert et al., 2005; Mageau, 2003). As an authority figure and the leader of their team, coaches have the largest role in creating the team climate. In addition to knowledge about their sport and physical skill development, coaches should be aware of their impact on players.

Critical to a positive youth sport experience is athlete autonomy. Mageau (2003) defined self-determined types of motivation as behaviors that are coherent with one's value system. The athlete who experiences self-determined intrinsic motivation freely decides to engage in the activity because the activity is important and in tune with one's values. On the other hand, non self-determined types of motivation refer to behaviors that are imposed on the self by others, the situation or by one's sense of obligation (Mageau et al., 2003). Coaches can support athlete autonomy by explaining the rationale for task limits, listening to athletes and allowing their input (choices), and providing non-

controlling competence feedback. These autonomy-supportive behaviors also have the effect of cultivating athletes' intrinsic motivation (Mageau et al., 2003).

And since the relationship between player and coach is a determining factor of not only the quality of the athlete's experiences, but also their motivation, coaches should focus on this relationship (Callow et al., 2009; Denison & Jowett, 2007). Teaching the skills is not enough, the coach must also create a working bond with the player (Denison & Jowett, 2007). Denison and Jowett (2007) found that central to the creation of a close working bond were mutual trust, respect, liking, and an appreciation of the sacrifices that both sides made to improve performance.

Besides impacting players' sense of autonomy and motivation, the coach's communication style also influences the behavior between teammates (Hodge & Lonsdale, 2008). Autonomy-supporting communication style has been found to lead to pro-social behavior towards teammates, while a controlling communication style was linked to anti-social behavior towards teammates. The perceived task-involving features of the coaching climate, especially role importance, co-operation, and improvement, were associated with experiencing higher levels of closeness, commitment, and complementarity with the coach. Perceptions of the ego-involving features of the coach-created environment, which emphasizes punitive responses to mistakes, rivalry, and unequal recognition, were associated with lower levels of perceived closeness, commitment, and complementarity with the coach (Boixados et al., 2004; Olympiou et al., 2008).

Similarly, Mouratidis (2010) surveyed 339 adolescent Greek athletes across numerous sports and found that autonomy supporting communication was linked to well-

being and future intentions to persist. On the other hand, controlling communication was linked to ill-being. They also found that autonomy-supporting corrective feedback negatively impacted intrinsic motivation to the degree the feedback was perceived by the athlete to be invalid. The author concludes that autonomy-supporting corrective feedback is worth employing, but that the coach must be aware of the way they communicate their feedback (Almagro, 2010; Mouratidis, 2010).

Cumming (2007) interviewed 268 adolescent basketball players about their sport enjoyment and evaluations of their coach. Win-loss record had little effect on ratings of sport enjoyment and coach evaluations, but a mastery-involved rather than an ego-involved motivational climate accounted for a large difference in athlete enjoyment (Cumming, 2007). This indicates that if a soccer club seeks to develop players who ultimately reach a high level, they should take care to train their coaches how to create an appropriate environment. Creating a climate that athletes enjoy is not only effective at retaining players, but also inspiring players to keep improving at their sport.

Luckily, through sport psychology interventions, coaches can be taught how to better create a team climate. Before a Little League baseball season, Smith (1979) led a behavioral-cognitive seminar on how to relate to children. The coaches who attended the seminar were evaluated more positively by their players, and a higher level of intra-team attraction was found on their teams. This favorable opinion from the kids changed despite the fact that they did not differ from controls in won-lost records. Children who played for the trained coaches exhibited a significant increase in general self-esteem compared with scores obtained a year earlier while control group children did not. The biggest difference was found among children low in self-esteem.

Even though many published articles explain effective coaching methods and the importance of autonomy supporting coaching behaviors, many coaches continue to behave in a way that is detrimental to youth development (Barber, 1999). Through training programs and sport psychology interventions coaching behaviors have slowly improved. But since these coaching classes are sparse and often expensive, many of the same problems persist.

An alternative to independent coaching seminars are coaching courses taught within a club by senior club coaches. In addition to improving the quality of coaching, these internal classes also serve the purpose of disseminating and elucidating the official club philosophy. However, no study definitively shows the prominence of these internal programs or the degree to which club coaches base their practices off of official club philosophies.

Purpose

Unlike the rest of the world, most youth soccer clubs in the United States are unattached to professional teams and funded by dues paid by parents (Kelley, 2006). Professional clubs take a long term approach, aiming to produce a professional level player more than a decade in the future. But the amateur club's first goal is to keep parents happy so that they remain at the club and continue to pay for training.

Yet many parents define success by wins and losses, not player development. This causes coaches to employ harsh tactics in order to squeeze out victories and please the parents. Yet the coaching behaviors adopted to amass more wins in the short term may ultimately cause athlete attrition (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2009) and ironically, parental dissatisfaction.

In order to halt this cycle, many clubs have adopted official philosophies for player development based off of the most successful professional academies, especially Ajax, Barcelona, and Arsenal. But there are limitations to the implementation of these philosophies, starting with the coaches. Most clubs are governed by a board of directors and a technical director, while coaches have varying degrees of power. Often a coach with practices contradictory to the club's established philosophy will have the support of important parents and threaten to form a new club if their coaching methods are changed. Other times, the club philosophy is relegated to the club website and never referenced.

This study will examine the congruence between a club's official philosophy, the implementation of that philosophy by coaches, and the experience of athletes and parents.

Chapter 3

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the congruence between a soccer club's official philosophy, the implementation of this philosophy by club coaches, and the experience of club players and parents. The following highlights the research design, participants, and data collection analysis.

Procedures

Participants

The participants for this study were veteran coaches ($n = 3$) from the same youth soccer club in the Northeast region of the United States. The club was a club that has existed for at least ten years and has an official philosophy posted on their club website. Additionally, since the study's author coaches for NY Red Bull, the largest and most influential youth soccer training organization in the Northeast Region, only clubs not officially affiliated with NY Red Bull were chosen.

The three coaches who have been with club the longest were sought out by a written recruitment statement. If any of the longest tenured coaches had not been available or unwilling to participate, any coach who has been with the club for over a year would have been recruited. Youth players ($n = 4$) from that club between the ages of 12 – 18 were interviewed, with priority going to the older players who have played with the club for more years. Player gender did not factor in the selection criteria. All players had to have been with the club for at least two years. Each parent ($n = 4$) was the adult primarily responsible for organizing their child's soccer activities. Each parent

interviewed had a child participating in the study. Relationships with other players and parents would have been formed to provide additional interviews if needed. All participants had been involved with this club for over two years.

Participant Recruitment

A Recruitment Statement (see Appendix A) was sent to youth soccer clubs in the Northeast region of the United States requesting authorization from the club for the author to watch practices ($n = 2$) of this club. During these contact hours, the author engaged players and parents in conversation, asking for their participation in interviews. In addition to informal personal conversation, an email was sent to the club president for approval and so that the president could forward this recruitment letter on to all club members. If more than three coaches had been interested, the three coaches who had been with the club the longest would have been selected. Likewise, if more than four players/parent groups responded, the oldest players who had been with the club for more than two years would have been selected. Four players (three male and one female) and four of their parents were identified to participate in a formal semi-structured interview. After obtaining approval from the Human Subjects Review at the author's affiliated academic institution, interviews took place after reading and signing an informed consent form (Appendix C).

Interviews

Interviews were semi-structured and took place in person at the training facility on another field out of earshot of the team's session. The interviewer stood facing the field, so that the interviewee faced away from the field and was less likely to be distracted. Probes such as "tell me more" or "can you give me an example?" were used to

encourage participants to expand upon their statements. Topics raised by participants that were not in the planned questions were followed up on by the interviewer to provide a full understanding of their responses. Upon the participant's consent, all interviews were tape recorded.

Interview Script

The interview script (Appendix B) was developed by review of the interview scripts of literature that investigates club environment (Henricksen, 2009) and by review of interview scripts of the literature that investigates positive and negative youth sport experience (Côté et al., 2009). The interview was semi-structured, which means a few main questions were asked and followed up by probes such as "Tell me more" and "Can you provide an example of" and "Has this always been the case?" This semi-structured interview methodology was chosen because it allows participants to dictate the direction of the conversation. If a theme consistently emerges among participants with limited prompting from the interviewer, then the theme is likely valid.

In the introductory part of the interview, interviewees were asked about their sporting background and history with soccer ("Please describe your experience playing or coaching soccer") (Henriksen, 2009). Main questions focused on the participants' experiences in the club (i.e., "Could you please tell me what it is like coaching/playing in this club," "Tell me about your/your child's development playing/coaching for this club"). In the analytical part of the interview, participants were asked about individual development and organizational culture and the relationships between those components ("Tell me about your coaching philosophy." "Thinking about your main coach, what

would you say his/her coaching philosophy is?”, “How is your coaching philosophy similar and different to the official club philosophy?” (Côté et al., 2009).

Data Analysis

Each interview was taped and transcribed verbatim immediately following its completion. The interviews were read multiple times so that the researcher was immersed in the content of the transcripts. Data was then analyzed through a process of inductive content analysis following the method proposed by Merriam (2009).

Significant statements were extracted from the interview transcripts (Armenrtout & Kamphoff, 2011). These significant statements were used to create meaning units that subsequently combined to create themes (Merriam, 2009). To facilitate the comparative analysis of the experience of coaches, players, and parents, themes were identified for each person individually (Merriam, 2009). A majority of participants must have articulated a significant statement for it to have been considered a theme. If no themes had emerged for any of the groups, an additional participant would have been recruited and their interview would have been analyzed. However, themes emerged so the recruitment of additional participants was not necessary. These themes provided evidence of the similarities and difference between the experiences of coaches, players, and parents of the same club.

After the interviews were conducted and analyzed, these themes were compared to the official philosophy through a process of document analysis. Using the club’s official philosophy from the club’s website as an artifact, this document analysis broke down the themes of the official philosophy. These themes were then compared the

themes from the interviews to find congruence and incongruence with the themes emerging from interviews.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Prior to the interviews with coaches, players and parents, the author of the study took part in a bracketing interview. This interview was conducted with the author's thesis advisor to establish the author's biases and history with youth soccer clubs. The bracketing interview is integral to the credibility of the study and the integrity of the author (Cresswell, 2000). Before conducting official interviews, the author of this study also conducted a pilot interview with a soccer coach from another state, as well as a youth player and the parent of a youth player. The purpose of this pilot interview is to ensure that the chosen questions produce answers that relate to the purpose of the study. This pilot interview also provided the researcher an opportunity to gain comfort with the interview script and the effectiveness of different probes.

Following the analysis of each interview with coaches, players and parents, the participant was given a full transcript, as well as a summary of the themes that emerged from data analysis. During this member checking they had a chance to authenticate the interpretations and conclusions that were derived from their interview. This member checking ensures the truthfulness of the content and interpretive accuracy (Cresswell, 2000).

In addition to bracketing, a pilot study, and member checking, the results of the data analysis were further strengthened by data analysis conducted by another researcher. Each transcript was read and analyzed independently by both researchers. If a significant statement, meaning unit, or theme was found both of the researchers, then it was

considered valid and credible. If it was found by only one person, it was not considered credible.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Analysis revealed participant responses centered around three higher order themes, which related to professional administration, soccer-specific training, and professional coaching. Contained within these higher order themes were sub-themes, which were supported by the statements made by participants. Table 1 presents the higher- and lower-order themes, and outlines the number of participants who discussed each theme. In the following section, themes are discussed using representative quotes from the players, coaches, and parents. Players are referred to as P1-4; Coaches as C1-3; and parents as Pa1-4 to provide anonymity.

Table 1. Interview Themes

Interview Themes from Players, Parents, and Coaches

<u>Higher-Order Theme</u>	<u>Sub-Theme</u>	<u>Number (of 11 interviews)</u>
Professional Organization	Physical Environment	7
	Atmosphere	8
	Administration	8
Soccer Specific Training	Style of Play	7
	Practice Characteristics	8
Professional Coaching	Coaching Development	6
	Coaching Climate	9
	Coach Characteristics	10

Higher Order Theme 1: Professional Organization

Of the eleven participants, ten mentioned the importance of the professional organization of the club. Participants mentioned that the impact of the professional organization was seen in the fields and uniforms, the social and work climate, and the way the administration ran the club. Responses were found to focus on the club's physical environment, atmosphere, and administration.

Sub-Theme 1: Physical Environment

Of the eleven participants, seven mentioned the quality fields and training environment present at the club. They mentioned the seven well-maintained fields configured around a large clubhouse with a big porch from which parents could watch practices and games. As one player (P4) said when asked what he liked about the club, "They have good fields for us to play on and think of us as players before they think of the club." Says one coach:

Look at this place. I mean, when I grew up playing in Clarkstown, we were playing on dirt fields and the Met Oval before it was turf, was dirt. And you come here to a clubhouse like this, beautiful fields, they support you with apparel, the expectation is that you're representing not only yourself and your team, but the club. (C2)

Participants also mentioned the importance of the clubhouse. In addition to providing parents with a vista from which to watch the fields, the clubhouse also contains a snack bar, meeting rooms, a classroom, and offices for the club administration. On the bottom floor is a large room with tables and televisions. Said one parent, "When the World Cup

was going on they had like snacks and beverages and you come down and watch it here and that was all included. They didn't ask for a cost on that.” (Pa1).

Coaches also appreciated the clubhouse. “I'm happy, it's great facilities, a great club. You got facility excellent, indoor facility. You got bunch beautiful soccer fields. You got cafeteria, you got classroom upstairs. They try to make it like a professional club.” (C3).

Even though the importance of the club's good facilities was mentioned by a majority of participants, the club's official philosophy does not mention the club's physical environment. This is at odds with the importance that players, coaches, and parents placed on the field complex, the clubhouse, and the practice uniforms.

Sub-Theme 2: Atmosphere

Of the 11 participants, eight commented on the positive atmosphere present at the club. Players mentioned the friendliness and acceptance of teammates, while parents often referred to the family atmosphere and welcoming environment created by the parents. Coaches talked about the open professional relationship between coaches and the interaction on teams. Says one player, “Our team doesn't start pointing fingers, we stick together and everyone are friends on the team.” (P1). Another player says, “Everybody on the team is really nice. They pass to me and are nice.” (P2). One parent said,

Everybody up here seems to be very friendly. They take care of their grounds, they take care of the place, you know. Very friendly place. I've had parents come over to talk to me from other teams, other teams. I just think that they have

something good here. Something good to offer both the soccer player and their families. (Pa2)

Coaches boasted of a collegial coaching atmosphere at the club. Said one coach,

Well you look at it and the difference between here and other clubs is there is no ego with the coaches so we have a friendly coaching staff. Friendly towards other coaches, cuz that's important, it's important that coaches get along and I found with the other academy that that wasn't going on. (C1)

Another coach described it as:

I don't have the ego that I want to take someone else's job or anything like that. Nothing's perfect, but most guys here want to see the club be successful and want to see each other be successful. Because when somebody's successful, that sheds a good light on the whole program and the brighter the light, the more opportunities these kids get. (C2)

A majority of participants commented on the importance of the positive atmosphere at the club. Similarly, in the club's official philosophy, a safe atmosphere is outlined as crucial to player development.

On the club's website part of the mission statement reads, "*Providing a safe, constructive and educational environment that will prepare committed soccer players to play the game at the highest levels.*"

In the section of the website that outlines the expectations of players, the following three points are highlighted as being required of players,

- *A personal commitment to demonstrate good sportsmanship on and off the playing field and to represent the program with high integrity.*

- *A personal commitment to not use profane or vulgar language on or off the field.*
- *A personal commitment to treat all players in the club program and all members of the coaching staff with respect.*

Parents too, have expectations that regulate their behavior. The website outlines some behaviors that help create a friendly atmosphere.

- *Never make any negative comments about a player, including your own.*
- *Never coach players from the sidelines during a game, including your own.*
- *Encourage and promote good sportsmanship and team work.*
- *Communicate in an open, respectful and productive manner with the Club and its coaching staff.*

Results show that there is congruence between the club's philosophy of creating a positive atmosphere and the actual atmosphere at the club. This is evidenced by the similarity of the club's mission statement and expectations with regard to a positive atmosphere and the responses of participants.

Sub-Theme 3: Administration

Eight of the eleven participants mentioned the importance of having a professional administration supporting the youth soccer club. Coaches were paid on time and games and practices were scheduled without hitch. Says one player,

I think they run it more like professionally and everything's at the top of where it could be, like you always have practice and they always supply uniforms and everything. Such as trainers always give you space to practice and shoot and do whatever you want. (P1)

Parents stressed that the club was committed to improving all players and teams, and the reputation of the club as a whole. Yearly tryouts created a culture of accountability.

Says one parent,

I think the culture of the club is they want this club to be the best, so they do tryouts every year to upgrade the teams. So, the culture of the club is they want to present the best teams possible and be the best club in the metro area. This is not Little League. (P3)

Another parent says,

They're always looking to improve and they're attracting the area's top players. So if you have a child that's good and can stay good and improve, then you're very fortunate. If you're a local person who has a child that is more competitive than rec soccer but not at a very high level, then you're kind of stuck. But it's a great program, very professional. Coaches are professional, they're always on time, they're always into it. They're doing the right thing for the kids. (P4)

Coaches also appreciate the professional environment. Says one coach,

I would say organizationally, it's very organized, very on top of things. There's an expectation here, not only amongst the administration, but also amongst coaches. I think they feel an expectation not only to the club, but to the other coaches in the club. It's just that there's an expectation of development and success. When you're here there's a set practice schedule and everybody's supposed to be and when someone's not here people take notice. It's professional. A level of professionalism is expected not only from the kids, but also the coaches. It comes

down from the top and when they see us dressed in their club gear, and they're wearing their club gear, it's also a sense of pride. (C2).

In the expectations that the club outlines on its website, it is stated that the player is expected to make:

- *A personal commitment to represent yourself in a professional manner at all times.*

The website also explains that players and their parents can expect from the club:

- *An opportunity to participate in a professional, educational soccer environment.*

As mentioned by participants, this professional environment is partly created by high standards reinforced by the club policy of yearly tryouts. Participants mentioned that their spot in the program was never safe, but that this pushed each player to be their best.

On the club's website the tryout and playing time policies are outlined as:

Tryouts: *The club holds open tryouts each year at the end of the spring season. The spring tryouts include two sessions for each age group. During tryouts, the club coaching staff observes and evaluates all players. The club expects all of its existing players to participate in tryouts each year. No player is guaranteed a spot on the roster for the subsequent year and must participate in tryouts and earn a position on each team. Players will be notified of the results of the tryouts once all of tryouts for the program are completed. In addition to the annual tryouts in the Spring, individual teams may hold supplemental tryouts at other times during the course of the year.*

Playing Time : *Playing time may be more or less than that of another player on the team and will be determined by the Head Coach. Playing time is based on attendance at training sessions and games, player attitude, player commitment level and playing ability. The club guarantees 100% playing time at every training session.*

Results show that there is congruence between the responses of participants and the philosophy outlined on the club's website. As evidenced by the responses of participants, the club policies were being implemented. Parents understood playing time and tryouts procedures, and commented on the professional way that the club was run. This awareness of the professional administration relates to the club's expectations of professional behavior and the professional environment that they aim to offer.

Higher-Order Theme 2: Soccer Specific Training

Of the eleven participants, ten mentioned the specific soccer training received at the club. Responses centered on the style of the play and the characteristics of practice, which referred to the importance the club trainers put on passing, keeping possession of the ball, and skills. Participants also mentioned that the practices were both fun and hard work.

Sub-Theme 1: Style of Play

Seven of the eleven participants mentioned that the club's teams played a similar style of soccer, with an emphasis on acquisition of technical skills, passing out of the back, and playing the ball along the ground. Says one player, "We do more drills and juggling. When we scrimmage he puts you in places where he knows you'll do good in. He pushed you to work on your weaker foot." (P2)

Another player says, “He talks about opening up and passing from the back. They teach us a lot about dribbling and the same kind of touches.” (P3) A third player mentioned the emphasis on passing by saying,

He makes us do passing lines. He’ll set up the team in passing lines and tell us where to pass and we’ll keep on going over it and everyone will touch the ball before we score, which I think is good because when we pass, the teams usually can’t stop us. The coaches like to pass the ball and see give and gos. (P4)

Coaches also mentioned a specific style of play which is based on possession and high pressure on defense.

You want your kids to play possession out of the back and play it forward.

Defensively, you want to play high pressure, win the ball back and get playing again. So that philosophy is for both teams. We’re going to learn to play the same way. (C2)

Says a second coach,

My coaching philosophy emphasizes kids become student of the game, kids develop their skills, and having them enjoy playing soccer. We get them to play a controlled game where we emphasize a lot on the skill and possession. I mean most of the coaches do share the philosophy. (C3)

As part of the mission statement of the club available on the website, the following statement reveals the focus of the club’s soccer specific training.

- *Providing the highest levels of professional training with a focus on skill development, technical and tactical training and competitive team play for all of its players.*

According to the website, the playing style is one based on attacking, skillful, possession-based soccer. The website says:

Playing Philosophy: *One common tenet of coaching is that the system of play should be chosen based on the players, not the opposite. With that said, the style of play within a club should not vary from one age group to the next, or from one coach to another. At a basic level, the goal of any youth club should be to play possession-oriented, attacking and skillful soccer. Within this guideline, there is room for tremendous variance based on personal preference. The best clubs in the country are marked by the fact that their teams, at every age group, attempt to play with a similar style and philosophy. (This is also a tremendous aid in player development across age groups.)*

Results show that there is a congruence between the responses of participants and the club philosophy when discussing style of play. Both participants and the official club philosophy mentioned the attacking, possession-oriented soccer. Both also mentioned the importance of skills, showing that the club philosophy was being implemented.

Sub-Theme 2: Practice Characteristics

Four of the participants commented that practices were hard work. Says one player, “I like that he’s not too strict but makes sure things get done and he makes us a better player. He trains us hard in practice and I’m always sweating when I come off the field.” (P1)

Another player says,

It’s much more work than my other team. It makes you work harder and is more exercise. All the teams are good, like the drills that the team does makes me work

hard. On one of my other teams the coaches just had us like scrimmage not do that many drills. (P2)

One of the parents describes the hard work in the practice by saying,

What I have seen and from him, he's just more disciplined towards the children. They want more and they pull more out of them. They challenge them a little bit more and she starts challenging herself. Before we came up here my daughter, she barely ever played the ball on the side, took the ball out and kicked it around by herself. Now she's doing it almost every day. She's looking to get better, she's trying to get better and that comes from the trainer. (Pa2)

Four participants also indicated that besides being hard, the practices were also fun. Says one player, "It's fun because you get to see all your friends and you get to meet different people. I have fun at the practices." (P3) Says another player,

It's really fun. These camps are good and have fun activities. It's really fun because the coaches are really nice to you and you play a good style going forward. My coach is funny. He's serious when we're doing ok, but if we're doing good, he'll tell us in a good voice and be funny. I like him. (P4)

A parent said about his son's coach, "He always says he wants the kids to have fun, which is the priority he says. He jokes around with them." (Pa1)

The club website states that the players are expected to display:

- *A personal commitment to become the very best soccer player you can be, given your ability. This commitment includes giving your best efforts in all team events such as training sessions, games and tournaments.*

Consistent with the expectation of hard work and commitment from players, coaches too are expected to provide quality, purposeful instruction. The website states that players and parents can expect from the club:

- *Consistent, organized, and purposeful instruction and training by the club coaches during the course of the season.*

Results show that there is congruence between the philosophy of the club and the responses of participants in regards to the commitment of players and coaches in training. However, participants mentioned the importance they placed on having fun at practice, which is not mentioned by the club in their philosophy.

Higher-Order Theme 3: Professional Coaching

Of the eleven participants, all eleven mentioned the importance of the professional coaching at the club. Responses talked about the coaching education program at the club, as well as the way coaches communicated and the behaviors displayed by the coaches. The responses related to coach development, coach climate, and coach characteristics.

Sub-Theme 1: Coaching Development

Six participants commented that the club provides coaches opportunities to continue learning about their craft and develop professionally. They also reimbursed expenses of coaches that took outside classes to earn additional licenses. Says one coach,

Well, look, I think the technical director has over the years has done a tremendous job with us, we tend to always have clinics where we have a coaching seminar, but it's just us trying to expand our knowledge and every coach bringing in.

We'll have breakfast set up and afterwards we'll eat and chitchat but we're always constantly expanding our knowledge. (C1)

Another coach says,

Yeah, listen, the one thing with this club that is maybe a little unique is education not only with the USSF licenses and everything like that, but internal education.

We've had coaches from Europe come in on two occasions for two three day seminars that were mandatory and those were 8 hour days and that philosophy was spread here... Listen, the one thing here, any classes that we take soccer related, and it's a pass, they'll pay for half of that tuition. (C2)

Says one parent about the club's coaches, "They're top coaches. They keep bringing coaches in from other areas too. They just keep upgrading the coaches. The coaches keep going back to school getting licenses." (Pa3)

The club's policy of developing coaches through instruction, feedback, and licensure is stated on the website:

Staff Development: *Successful businesses have talented people at every level who are ready to "move up" when their superior is promoted or leaves for another company. Both depth and "upward mobility" of staff are reflective of an environment where employees are challenged, developed, and recognized for their abilities. The best clubs have a program for internal staff development - both formally (licensing courses, seminars, etc.), and informally (regular feedback and observation, mentoring, etc.).*

Results show an appreciation of the importance of coach development. This emphasis came both from the club's philosophy and the responses of participants.

Participants valued that the club aided in the continuing development of coaches - a component in the club's official philosophy. The similarity of participant responses and the club's official philosophy of staff development show a congruence between the philosophy and themes emerging from interviews.

Sub-Theme 2: Coaching Climate

Nine participants commented on the positive coaching climate present at the club. Responses centered on the communication of coaches, especially coaches of different teams, and the high degree to which coaches aimed to develop players (rather than just trying to win games). Says one parent,

There's coaches and there's trainers and what I see here is that the coaches are trainers. They can coach a game and they can train your children. Teams back where I'm from, they had a trainer and a coach. Someone to coach the games and someone to train them. I like it here where the coach is actually the trainer. It's more hands on, it's more direct, they know the kids a little better. If you have a trainer, he can only inform the trainer of how good a kid is, what to work on. But if you're the coach and trainer, then you know how to work on that child and you can distribute it to the child himself. (Pa2)

Says another parent,

Yeah, this team and some of the teams interact better with their co-team. This team communicates very well with the other team. He realizes this is the feeder program for that. He's got a kid that's ready to go to the next level, you're not holding them back to keep the team competitive. (Pa3)

Coaches also comment on the coaching climate at the club. Says one coach,

I would think, put it his way, the technical director has a core bunch of guys that's been in since forever.... Guys do buy in and it's a pretty good atmosphere. (C1)

Says another coach,

The main philosophy has to be the same. Cuz I think if you go off on your own, you're not part of that team and to be successful, we have to work collectively as a team. At some point in time we're all going to need each other and we always need help whether it be covering if someone can't make a practice. It's nice when we're all on the same page and you can call some guy and say, listen, I'm running late or I can't be there on Tuesday, can you take over my practice. (C2)

A third coach comments on the positive coaching climate by saying,

I think it's excellent. All the coaches get along well. And what's nice about the club is there's a relationship between young kids and older kids... For example, I'll bring some players from my older teams to work with the younger teams and vice versa, so you have a relationship. (C3)

The website mentions this coaching culture by talking about roles and commitment:

Culture Creation: Club culture can create an environment conducive for success or failure, and an environment that retains players and staff or loses them. Creating positive culture can be as basic as defining (and limiting) the roles and responsibilities of different constituents -- parents, the Board of Directors, coaches, etc. Positive culture is reflected in an environment where players and coaches internalize the work rate and commitment required for success, and feel loyalty to the organization. At the highest level, the director of coaching is the

most important person in the club in creating a culture that values and rewards player development instead of a culture that focuses solely on winning.

Results show an emphasis on the coaching climate at the club. Both participants and the official philosophy emphasize the positive coaching climate, especially the importance of loyalty to the organization. There is congruence between the club's philosophy and the actual club as perceived by interview participants.

Sub-Theme 3: Coaching Characteristics

Eleven participants mentioned certain characteristics that were present in the coaches at the club. Most commonly mentioned were that the coaches were nice, strict, care about the player's confidence and have high expectations. Says one player,

I think all the coaches are really good but I like mine the best. Some of them I went to camps and I've had other coaches and all of them they made you a better player, some more strict than others. And they're still good coaches 'cuz they got you to do what they wanted you to do and got you better. (P1)

A second player says, "In practice when a girl does something really good he praises them and says good job. Well he pushes everyone to be their best and I really like that."

(P2) A third player says about his coach, "He's really nice. He's very funny at practice.

He is a lot about teamwork." (P3)

Parents praised the coaching staff for being able to build a strong relationship with the players while pushing them to improve. Says one parent,

My kid's coach is sincere. He's actually a great trainer. Kids do respect him.

He's very knowledgeable. He loves the game...He's a good trainer. He is a

serious coach in the sense that he doesn't tolerate any goofing off on the field or

joking around. He wants you to be committed for the hour and a half or two hours that you are here because he's committed and he feels that the kids should be. (P1)

Coaches displayed a passion for coaching that came through clearly to parents and players. Says one coach,

Well, look, again, I'm 100% passionate about what I do so with my philosophy my players are my ultimate goal and I pretty much schedule everything around my players and my coaching. (C1)

The club's website mentions the importance of attracting and hiring the right coaches, but it does not specify which qualities are most important. It says:

***Staff Recruitment and Assignment:** Identifying coaches with special talents, or coaches who can help your club in specific areas, is key in creating a staff with depth and breadth. A director of coaching should always be looking to attract great coaches, and individuals with the potential to become great coaches. Just as important, a director of coaching needs to assign the right coach to the right age group based on the particular strengths of the coach and the demands of the age group.*

Results show that there is not a clear agreement between the official club philosophy and the responses of participants with regard to the characteristics possessed by coaches. The club philosophy states that it is important to attract quality coaches, but does not specify what specific characteristics make a good coach.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gain a practical understanding of the degree to which youth soccer club philosophies are implemented within clubs and inform the club's policies and practices. This study grew out of the author's experience working within youth soccer clubs where he saw a disconnect that often existed between the organization's official philosophy and the actual practices of the club's administration and employees. This study aimed to present a case study exemplifying the congruence between a club's official philosophy and the implementation of that philosophy as experienced by parents, coaches, and players. This discussion is organized into the sections consisting of "club philosophy in practice," and "contradictions between club philosophy and experiences."

Club Philosophy in Practice

Atmosphere

Participants consistently mentioned the importance of the friendly climate at the club. The club was talked about as an inviting place, a place to make friends whether you are a coach, a parent, or a player. This friendly atmosphere was seen as one of the main positives associated with playing soccer for the club, and may be crucial in retaining players from season to season (Allen, 2003).

It appears, therefore, that an environment that is perceived to be inviting, supportive and respectful can provide a sense of belongingness that leads youth to like their teammates and coaches more. These aspects of the atmosphere are suggestive of an autonomy-supportive climate. Sport psychology research has shown that an autonomy-

supportive climate is linked with athlete satisfaction and ongoing interest in continuing to play the sport. (Pelletier Fortier, Vallerand, & Briere, 2002) Additionally, it is possible that when young athletes see their coach engaging in caring behaviors, it leads them to model those behaviors with the coach and their teammates (Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010).

The club philosophy states many expectations for behavior of parents and players. It is likely detailing appropriate and inappropriate behaviors helps to create the positive atmosphere present at the club. This is in line with research conducted by Albert (2005) which showed clear expectations of both coaches and parents were crucial in providing youth sport experiences that foster psychosocial growth. This study's findings support sport psychology research which has shown the importance of an autonomy-supporting climate (Balaguer et al., 2002) and the relationship between climate and athlete retention (Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Briere, 2002).

Previous research exploring the commitment of youth to continue their participation in sport has found that the coaching climate plays a key role. Specifically, coaches trained in coach effectiveness programs have been found to have reduced attrition rates among youth baseball players (Smith, Smoll, Barnett, & Everett, 1993). Additionally, a perceived task-involving climate positively predicted perceptions of competence and autonomy which in turn negatively predicted dropout status among female handball players (Sarrizin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier, & Cury, 2002). These findings on the importance of sport climate support the findings of this study, which showed a positive club climate as being one of the most important aspects of the youth soccer experience.

When athletes perceive a friendly climate in which the coach wants to help them, and is kind and caring toward them and the team, and teammates exhibit acceptance and respect for each other, they enjoy their sport experience more. Research on friendship quality provides insight into this point. Weiss and Smith (2002) found that greater friendship quality positively predicted commitment in sport. Additionally, Ullrich-French and Smith (2009) found that friendship quality also predicted continuation in a youth soccer program one year later. This study's findings appear to show that friendship can add to the benefits experienced in sport not only by making it a more enjoyable experience for young people but also strengthening their commitment to participate. The findings of these studies are in line with the responses of participants in this study, which stress the importance of friendship.

Additionally, friends made on the sports team share that sport in common, so it is possible that they may play the sport outside of practice and thus improve at the sport. There is a need for more study of friendship quality and talent development, specifically the relationship between intra-team friendships and practice outside of the team context.

Although peer relations within youth sports have been studied considerably (Evans & Roberts, 1987; Smith, 1999), few soccer clubs highlight the importance of peer relationships in their official philosophies, which is strange since kids report it as one of the main reasons they play sports (Allen, 2003). This club mentioned their professional training atmosphere, and detailed the expectations of parents and players, but did not publicize the expectations of coaches. Since coaching behaviors may influence climate more than the behavior of players or parents, it would be useful for these expectations to be visible on the website. Additionally, although friendship between players has been

shown to lead to a positive sport experience and reduce attrition rates, there has been no research into friendship among parents in a club. Research has focused on parental stressors (Harwood, Drew & Knight, 2010) and the effect of parenting-styles on their children's sport experience (Sapieja, Dunn & Holt, 2011). Since it has been shown that parents greatly impact their children's enjoyment and motivation in sport (Sánchez-Miguel, Leo, Sánchez-Oliva, Amado, & García-Calvo, 2013), more research should be conducted on parents' experiences. One place to start would be research investigating parental friendship and its impact on child sport enjoyment.

Coach Climate

During interviews, coaches commented on the collegial coaching climate present between coaches at the club. This positive climate may be related to the forming of friendly bonds at the internal coach trainings, but it also may be related to the recruitment of employees with similar values. Many of the study's findings are consistent with organizational culture literature, specifically those relating to employee-organization value congruence. The Person-Environment (P-E) Fit Theory assumes that individuals prefer an environment that possesses characteristics (e.g., values, beliefs) that are similar to their own (Kroeger, 1995). In the context of an organization, this theory is referred to as person-organization (P-O) fit. The concept of P-O fit is important to organizations because it suggests that if people fit well with an organization, they are likely to exhibit more positive attitudes and behaviors. This positive relationship between P-O fit and positive behaviors is supported by the literature, and many studies have found relations between P-O fit and work-related attitudes and behaviors (Boxx, Odom, & Dunn, 1991; Posner, 1992).

When an employee's values match those of an organization and those of their colleagues in the organization, the values are said to be congruent. Researchers suggest that the level of value congruence between employees and their organization is positively related to attitudes such as satisfaction and commitment (Adkins, Ravlin, & Meglino, 1996; Boxx et al., 1991). Person-Organization fit is especially important in a youth soccer club because much of the work (coaching) comes in locations isolated from one another. While the director of coaching or club administrators are at one field watching one coach, twenty other coaches may be conducting their own training sessions unsupervised. This isolation and lack of oversight is exacerbated by the distances teams travel to attend away games and tournaments.

This study addresses the application of youth soccer club philosophies to the actual coaching being done on the field and relates to the employee-organization value congruence studies that have been conducted in many non-sport organizations. However, it is important to note that because of the decentralized nature of soccer clubs and the distances between coaching sessions, soccer clubs are different from most organizations and business. Besides doing a majority of work away from the eyes of administrators and directors, coaches are in a leadership position within their teams. The loyalty of most parents and players is to the child's coach, not the greater organization (Woldenden & Holt, 2004). This creates an issue of control, a club that makes the decision to fire a coach must consider whether the customer (parents) could leave and follow the coach to another club. For this reason finding and hiring coaches whose values fit with those of the organization may be the first and most crucial step to implementing those values in real life.

Not a single participant in this study brought up the issue of control between coaches and the club, although one parent mentioned that he and his son had followed their coach to the present club when the coach left a previous club. This could be linked to the high satisfaction with the club of the players, parents, and coaches. Although no participant could recite the official philosophy of the club, all had similar responses about what the club stood for which were similar, though worded differently, to the official philosophy. This indicates a value congruence between the club and the members, which relates back to the lack of conflict between coaches and administration. Although there has been considerable study of organizational culture and value congruence in the organizational psychology literature (Adkins, Ravlin, & Meglino, 1996; Boxx, Odom, & Dunn, 1991; Posner, 1992), few studies apply this same lens to sports organizations. This is an area that requires more research.

Style of Play

Coaches and players mentioned the specific style of soccer taught and played by all of the teams in the club. This style utilized an emphasis on technical skills, possession of the ball, and sending large numbers of players forward into attack. The club's emphasis on these skills is in line with their stated philosophy. These principles are also consistent with the US Soccer curriculum and the principles taught in coaching courses by US Soccer and National Soccer Coaches Association of America (Reyna, 2011). Although the emphasis on technical skills at a young age and possession based play as the players mature is now taught through every country's soccer federation, implementation of these best practices has continued to be an issue for clubs (Reyna, 2011).

The club in the study was founded by the director of coaching. Having a director of coaching with the power to hire and fire allows there to be a consistent scheme bringing the right people with similar philosophies of youth soccer coaching into the club. The importance of bringing in the right coaches is consistent with literature of culture creation among college programs (Schroeder, 2010). Schroeder (2010) found that assistant coaches should not only have similar values, but share a similar vision of the way the game should be played. When the decision of hiring is split among different board members or parent leaders, it is less likely that all of the coaches will have similar philosophies for developing players. These similar philosophies are especially important when a player goes from one team to another within the club.

US Soccer has a crew of full-time scouts who travel the country watching games of the major youth soccer clubs and evaluating the club's ability to play possession-based, skillful, attacking soccer at all levels and age groups. It remains to be seen what influence these evaluations have on the practices within clubs as they are urged to create a consistent style of play through all teams.

The consistency of the style of play and training across a club has seen little importance in the sport psychology literature, but it is of great concern to soccer governing bodies. The training providing by the club is the primary service of the club, while the style of play is the result of the service provided. Business literature has shown the importance of a consistency throughout the service provided by any company (Lengermann, 1996), as well as the importance of training and review processes to educate the workforce about the standards and enforce these standards (Lengermann, 1996). The field of sport psychology has not yet investigated the impact of creating a

consistent style across separate teams within one club. This seems a topic worthy of more study.

Coaching Development

Participants in this study commented time and again on the extensive coaching development present at the club. While it would be expected for the coaches to mention the training they receive, it was surprising the degree to which parents were aware of the coaching education program at the club. In part, this may be because of the publicity of the coach development program on the club's website. Also, coach education and promotion from within is central to the philosophy of the club. On the website, there are numerous photos of the coaching education sessions run by the European coaches that had been brought over by the director of coaching. Also, a detailed description of the duties of the director of coaching, especially in regard to recruitment, management, and training, are highlighted on the website. This online publicity connects parents to the club as a whole, and makes them aware of the organizational support provided to the coaches of their kids.

The coaching education at the club has many roles. On the one hand, it is expected that through continuing education, the level of each coach raises, even if only a little. Also, the philosophy of the club is disseminated through these meetings regarding the style of soccer, the pedagogy of the on-field training, and expectations of coaching behavior. In this study, all of the coaches who had been interviewed pointed out that they had their own personality and experiences which shaped them into the coaches they are today. Yet, they all mentioned that they appreciated the meetings as an opportunity to learn, bond with their colleagues at the club, and learn more about the club philosophy.

Learning from both informal experiences, as an athlete or assistant coach, and formal training has been shown by sport psychology literature as crucial in the development of coaches (Lemyre, Trudel, & Durand-Bush, 2007). Therefore, establishing a coherent system of coach education that includes the opportunity to learn from both informal and formal experiences is crucial in the proper training of youth sports coaches.

The importance of these formal meetings was mentioned by coaches repeatedly. They said that during the meetings, coaches were committed and happy to be there, which could be seen by their willingness to participate in the drills as players. One of the coaches mentioned that the director of coaching would put on his cleats and play himself, which that coach took to be a sign of an inclusive atmosphere.

Also, coaches were encouraged to attend coaching courses offered by the National Soccer Coaches Association of America and by US Soccer. The club aided coaches' attendance by paying for half of their tuition to any course that a coach attended and in which they got a passing grade. This policy of aiding coaches in attending standardized coaching programs makes sense considering the research showing the effectiveness of these standardized coach education programs (Campbell & Sullivan, 2005).

The attention to coach education also encompassed mentorship from the director of coaching, who had coached at a high level within US Soccer and college soccer. It is likely that his experience and connections allowed him to retain his coaches' loyalty and respect, as well as to make coaches excited to come to meetings to learn from him.

Most of the research about the effectiveness and effect of training programs have focused on sport psychology training for coaches (Barnett, Smoll, & Smith, 1992; Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007; Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979; Smoll, Smith, Barnett, &

Everett, 1993) and have shown the effectiveness of these trainings. Also, the perceived value that the coaches placed on the coach education supports the coach education literature which has shown the positive effect of these formal education experiences on the coaches' efficacy (Malete & Feltz, 2000). However, a similar review has not been undertaken regarding the usefulness of intra-club coaching trainings. The educational processes for coaches within a club influence not just the development of players, but also the development of kids as people. As such, it is worth it for the field to spend more time investigating coach development within a club in the hope of pinpointing some best practices that can be replicated by other clubs.

Contradictions Between Club Philosophy and Experiences

Club Philosophy Not Found in Experiences

Central to the club philosophy is the expectation that all people involved with the club - coaches, players, parents, and administrators - will work to raise the soccer level of the club. In the official philosophy it says "A commitment to provide the best opportunities for our players to advance to the next level (Olympic development program, regional competition, national competition and collegiate competition)." Part of providing opportunities to advance to the next level is being involved with the highest level leagues. This club has its male teams enrolled in the US Soccer Development Academy and the female teams enrolled in the Elite Clubs National League. These leagues are the most competitive leagues in the country, affording the players in the club the opportunity to play against the best competition in the nation and be seen by scouts for colleges and youth national teams. Many clubs apply to be in these leagues, but only an elite few are selected.

However, the leagues that the club was a part of were never mentioned by any participants as important to their experience at the club. This is interesting, since it is likely that many of the club's players were initially drawn to try out at the club because of the prestigious leagues within which the club's teams are enrolled. Similarly, the club boasts an extremely experienced coaching staff consisting largely of former professional players who have also coached in college. Yet only one participant commented on the experience and soccer knowledge of the coaching staff. Instead, participants talked about the positive way the coaches interact with the kids, the passion they have for the game, and the amount they care about their players. This surprising finding reinforces the phrase "they don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care" and shows that this concept applies even to players at the elite level. The field of sport psychology has emphasized the importance of coaching behaviors for creating a positive youth sports experience (Albert et al., 2005; Alfermann et al., 2012; Denison & Jowett, 2007). This study reinforces the field's findings in this regard.

Themes Not Found in Club Philosophy

Physical Environment

The physical environment was mentioned by a majority of participants. Participants consistently commented on the importance of having well-maintained fields in one central location. They mentioned the clubhouse both for its utility as a gathering space and a place to watch practice and games when it rains. Participants also talked about the clubhouse as something special that other clubs did not have, making the clubhouse a symbol of the club's rise to prominence. Millions of dollars were spent building and maintaining the field complex, but the club does not mention the facilities in

their official philosophy or expectations. This is surprising considering the importance that participants placed on the facilities.

The importance of facilities mentioned by participants is in line with the sport psychology literature. It has been found that facilities are important for the development of elite athletes (Awoyinka & Adeyeye, 2007), and impact the amount that children exercise (Limstrand, 2008). Facilities have also been shown to play a key role in student-athletes' decisions during college recruiting (Davis, 2006). It is likely that facilities would have a similar effect on the recruitment of youth soccer players as it does on college athletes.

The perceived importance of suitable facilities has been shown by the building of expensive training centers by professional and amateur clubs in all sports, as well as in the responses of players, parents, and coaches at this club. However, there is a gap in our knowledge as to the actual efficacy of these facilities within the youth soccer community.

Coach Characteristics

Players and parents referred to the coaches in the club as “nice,” “strict,” “demanding,” “experienced,” “passionate,” “having high expectations,” and “caring”. Each parent emphasized the importance of having professional coaches, and professionalism from the coaches as a whole. The specific personal characteristics displayed by coaches are important because coaches provide the actual service being paid for by parents. They also influence the quality of the experience for players, both within the domains of sport development and youth development. However, besides stating that the club was always looking to attract “quality” coaches, there is nothing in the philosophy describing the characteristics of a “quality” coach.

All of the qualities mentioned by participants have been referenced in coaching literature as important components of a competent coach (Gardner & Shields, 1996). Becker (2009) interviewed eighteen high level players about each player's best coach. That study found the coach's cognitive, emotional, social, and psychological characteristics most important to players. Cognitively, players mentioned their best coaches as knowledgeable, smart, innovative, and creative. Emotionally, coaches were said to have been passionate, enthusiastic, inspirational, calm but intense, and emotionally stable. Socially, players said their coaches were loyal, genuine, patient, honest, humorous, likable, and demanding. In the psychological domain, players said their coaches were confident, disciplined, competitive, professional, committed, and organized (Becker, 2009).

The characteristics of great coaches and the effect of coach behavior on athlete experience has been studied (Albert, Cornelius, Van Raalte, Jones, 2005; Almgaro et al., 2010) and best practices have been agreed upon by the field of sport psychology. However, there is a lack of study on the degree to which organizational processes and education influences the coaching characteristics and behavior of coaches. There is also a lack of research investigating the effect of coach characteristics on the climate of the club as a whole.

Chapter 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

In the United States, millions of children play soccer for youth soccer clubs. Almost all youth soccer clubs have crafted a club developmental philosophy that is supposed to guide all of their work with young athletes. Yet, the degree to which these philosophies are actually implemented by club coaches is unknown.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether there was congruence between 1) the stated philosophy of the club, 2) implementation of this philosophy by coaches, and 3) experiences of players and their parents. Coaches ($n = 3$) from a youth soccer club in the Northeast United States, as well as players ($n = 4$) and parents ($n = 4$) from the same club took part in semi-structured interviews to determine the club's implementation of their official club philosophy. Themes were determined by content analysis to answer the research questions.

Of the eleven participants, a majority mentioned the professional organization of the club, the soccer specific training, and the professional coaching. Responses were found to focus on the club's physical environment, atmosphere, and administration, style of play, practice characteristics, coach development, coach climate, and coach characteristics.

All of the themes that emerged from interviews with participants were specifically mentioned in the club's official philosophy except for two: the quality of the facilities and the specific characteristics that make a good coach. This congruence between the

experiences of players, parents, and coaches and the official philosophy show that the philosophy is being implemented on the field and in the clubhouse where it matters.

The successfulness of the implementation of the club philosophy is due to a few systems that the club has put in place. On the one hand, the club has a thorough policy of coach education during which the philosophy is explained and disseminated. The club also shares key documents on player development and age-appropriate curriculums on the website to educate coaches on the development trajectory that the club has set for the players. Also, the club has written the philosophy and policies regarding playing time, tryouts, and behavior for all members clearly on their website. Finally, there is a director of coaching with the power to hire and fire coaches (as well as drop players from the program) who enforces the standards that have been set down in the philosophy.

Conclusions

The results of this study yielded the following conclusions:

- 1) The creation of an official club philosophy is an effective way to create expectations for behavior within a youth soccer club.
- 2) The implementation of this club philosophy is more closely linked to the development experience the club provides than the existence of the philosophy itself.
- 3) Systems of education for coaches and parents should be in place for the long-term implementation of the philosophy.
- 4) Clubs would benefit by creating a clear power structure whereby those whose personal philosophies are at odds with those of the club are brought in line with the club philosophy or removed from the club.

Recommendations

The following recommendations for further study were made after the completion of this investigation:

- 1) Further investigation of clubs' implementation of official philosophies using the same methods as used in this study should be taken.
- 2) Investigation into the efficacy of intra-club education systems and licensed coaching courses would allow clubs to know whether to allocate their resources to funding external coaching courses or to investing in their internal coach education.
- 3) Study of the effect of coach behavior on the climate of the club will allow clubs to set expectations for coach behavior that result in a positive climate.
- 4) Study of value congruence within the coaches of soccer clubs will allow directors of coaching to better identify those coaches who are a good fit for the club.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Statement

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Nathan Bell and I am a Master's of Sport Psychology student at Ithaca College. I am seeking a youth soccer club that would be interested in participating in research for my Master's thesis. My thesis will investigate the youth soccer experiences of coaches, players and parents. For my thesis, I seek to interview three veteran coaches from the club, four club players, and one parent of each player, with a total of eleven interviews. Each interview will take between 20 and 60 minutes and occur near the club's soccer fields or another quiet location of the participant's choice. Participants may withdraw from the study at any point and can choose not to answer any question with which they are uncomfortable. The data from the interviews will remain confidential. After transcription and analysis, important themes that emerged from each interview will be shared with the interviewee for verification. If you are interested in having your club participate in this study, please contact me by email at nbell1@ithaca.edu or by phone at 845-558-1955.

Thank you,
Nathan Bell

APPENDIX B

Interview Script

Coaches

Introductory Statement: This interview will take between 20 minutes and an hour depending upon your responses. Please feel free to be as open with your responses as you like. There are no right or wrong answers. Your participation is greatly appreciated and the content of this interview will remain confidential. This interview will be recorded, transcribed, and stored securely on a password protected computer.

- 1) Please describe your experience playing or coaching soccer.
 - 2) How long have you been coaching at this club?
 - 3) What is it like coaching soccer at this club?
 - 3) How would you describe your coaching philosophy?
 - 4) In what ways is your personal coaching philosophy similar and different from the official club philosophy?
- (probes to be used: please explain what you mean by..., can you provide an example of..., has this always been the case?)

Players

Introductory Statement: This interview will take between 20 minutes and an hour depending upon your responses. Please feel free to be as open with your responses as you like. There are no right or wrong answers. Your participation is greatly appreciated and the content of this interview will remain confidential. This interview will be recorded, transcribed, and stored securely on a password protected computer.

Rapport Building Questions:

- 1) Who is your favorite player?
 - 2) Did you watch the “Euros” this summer?
 - 3) Which is your favorite team?
- 1) Please describe your experience playing soccer.
 - 2) What are your experiences playing soccer at this club?
 - 3) Thinking about your main coach, tell me about your coach’s coaching philosophy?
 - 4) Based upon the coaching philosophy you just described, could you give a few examples?
 - 5) What do you like about the way he/she coaches?
 - 6) What do you not like?

Parents

Introductory Statement: This interview will take between 20 minutes and an hour depending upon your responses. Please feel free to be as open with your responses as you like. There are no right or wrong answers. Your participation is greatly appreciated and the content of this interview will remain confidential. This interview will be recorded, transcribed, and stored securely on a password protected computer.

- 1) Please describe your child’s experience with soccer.
- 2) What are your experiences as a parent in this club?
- 4) Can you please describe the coaching philosophy of your child’s main coach.
- 5) Based upon the coaching philosophy you just described, could you give a few examples?
- 6) What do you like about the way he/she coaches?
- 7) What do you not like?

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

OFFICIAL YOUTH SOCCER CLUB PHILOSOPHIES:

EXPERIENCES OF COACHES, PLAYERS, AND PARENTS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between the official youth soccer club philosophy and the experiences of coaches, parents, and players.

Benefits of the Study

An increased awareness of the implementation of youth soccer club philosophies for both study participants and administrators. This awareness may translate into tangible changes in the way clubs interact with their coaches.

What You Will Be Asked to Do

Take part in a 20-60 minute interview. Upon completion of transcription by researcher, participant will also be asked to read the transcript to assess its accuracy.

Only players, parents, or coaches who have been with the club for at least two years are invited to inquire.

Players under the age of 18 will be required to provide a statement from their parent or guardian allowing their participation in the study.

Risks

No risks involved.

Compensation for Injury

No chance of injury.

If You Would Like More Information about the Study

Contact Nathan Bell by phone at 845-558-1955 or by email at nbell1@gmail.com

Withdraw from the Study

Participants may withdraw from the study at any time..

How the Data will be Maintained in Confidence

Identity will remain anonymous. Audio tapes and interview transcripts will be stored by the researcher and remain confidential.

I have read the above and I understand its contents. I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.

Print or Type Name

Signature

Date

I give my permission to be audiotaped (videotaped).

Signature

Date