Anne Fylling Frøyen

The Need for Relatedness?

A Study of Relationship Dynamics and Psychological Mechanisms in theCoach-Athlete Relationship at the World-Class Level

NIH NORWEGIAN SCHOOL
OF SPORT SCIENCES

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Summary

Introduction: Achieving continuous success in the highly demanding context of world-class sport is a prerogative of very few athletes and coaches (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Coaches, as well as athletes, play essential roles in this context, and the quality of their relationship is understood as one of the key factors for success (Jowett, 2017; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). With the quality of the coach-athlete relationship being a key factor for success, it makes it important to gain more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the ongoing and dense dynamics in such relationships at this level.

Aim: The main aim of this thesis was to gain in-depth and detailed knowledge about the relationship dynamics and the psychological mechanisms operating within the coach-athlete relationship at the world-class level, perceived from the perspective of both coaches and athletes.

The Studies: This thesis comprises five studies. All the data were collected with the use of semi-structured interviews. The first two studies investigated antecedents of need satisfaction of basic psychological needs of athletes (n=6) and coaches (n=4) in relation to each other. In the third study, we explored the meaning of the coach-athlete relationship for two male super-elite athletes. In the fourth study, we investigated the interpersonal knowledge of two serial-winning coaches and how they used this expertise to build a collaborative partnership with their athletes. In the fifth study, we sought to get detailed insight into the use of communication, its meaning and purpose in two coach-athlete dyads.

Main Results: In the first study, to be seen as a "whole person" and acknowledged in the planning and execution of training represented antecedents of satisfaction of autonomy among athletes. Further, help to improve skills and feeling supported as an athlete was important antecedents for the need satisfaction of competence and relatedness for the athletes.

For the coaches in study 2, feedback on the quality of their work was an antecedent of need satisfaction of competence. Information about their athletes' life situation and insight into their thoughts and feelings in different competitive situations provided them with a sense of security. It thus represented antecedents of need satisfaction of relatedness. Potential antecedents of need thwarting for both athletes and coaches were also illuminated. Study 3 provided us with insight into the relational consequences of the coach being perceived as a stressor and potential disturbance to performance, and how super-elite athletes can use their accumulated power to distance themselves from their coach. The main findings in study 4 were that the basic premise for the coaches' interaction with the athletes was a recognition that their perception of a situation did not necessarily represent the only reality or correct answer. Further, building high-quality coach-athlete relationships was, in many ways, a buffer for unnecessary risk-taking and disruptions in a context marked by uncertainty. In study 5, the findings revealed that both dyads perceived the quality of their communication process as essential for building and sustaining relationship quality. They also perceived the quality of their communication as a crucial performance-enhancing factor, and thus they explicitly trained on their communication to be optimally prepared in competitions.

Conclusion: In summary, the findings from the present thesis highlight the complexity of the relationship dynamics and psychological mechanisms underpinning these dynamics. Several theoretical frameworks and concepts provided useful perspectives to explain and discuss our findings, and hence, contributed with valuable viewpoints on what goes on within the coach-athlete relationship at the world-class level in sport, and its significance for both relationship quality and performance.

Sammendrag

Introduksjon: Suksess over tid i den svært krevende toppidrettskonteksten er noe som kun et fåtall av trenere og utøvere klarer å oppnå (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Både trenere og utøvere har svært viktige roller i denne konteksten, og kvaliteten i relasjonen dem imellom er anerkjent som en nøkkelkomponent for suksess (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett, 2017). Denne betydningen av relasjonskvalitet for suksess gjør det viktig og interessant å opparbeide mer inngående kunnskap om og forståelse av dynamikken i denne relasjonen hos de som presterer på verdenstoppnivå.

Mål: Hovedmålet med denne avhandlingen var å opparbeide inngående og detaljert kunnskap om relasjonsdynamikk og psykologiske mekanismer i trener-utøverrelasjonen hos de som presterer på verdenstoppnivå, sett fra både trener- og utøverperspektivet.

Studiene: Denne avhandlingen består av fem studier. Alle dataene ble samlet inn gjennom semi-strukturerte intervjuer. De to første studiene undersøkte hvordan utøvere (n=6) og trenere (n=4) bidrar til å tilfredsstille grunnleggende psykologiske behov innad i relasjonen. I den tredje studien undersøkte vi betydningen av trener-utøverrelasjonen for to mannlige utøvere i verdensklasse. I den fjerde studien undersøkte vi den mellommenneskelige kunnskapen til to trenere i verdensklasse, og hvordan de anvendte denne ekspertisen til å bygge et samarbeidene partnerskap med sine utøvere. Den femte studien var en detaljert undersøkelse av kommunikasjon, dens betydning og hensikt i to trener-utøverdyader.

Resultater: I den første studien var det å bli sett som et «helt menneske», og å bli inkludert i planleggingen og gjennomføringen av treningen viktige forløpere til behovstilfredsstillelse av autonomi for utøverne. Videre var bistand til å forbedre ferdigheter, og det å få støtte fra trener viktige forløpere til tilfredsstillelse av kompetansebehovet og tilhørighetsbehovet. For trenerne i studie 2 var tilbakemelding fra utøverne om at de gjorde en

god jobb en forløper til behovstilfredsstillelse av kompetanse. Innsikt i utøvernes generelle livssituasjon, samt kjennskap til hvordan utøverne tenkte og følte i ulike konkurransesituasjoner ga trenerne en form for trygghet og bidro derfor til behovstilfredsstillelse av tilhørighet. Mulige forløpere til opplevd motarbeidelse av de grunnleggende psykologiske behovene ble også belyst fra både utøver- og trenerperspektivet. Resultatene i studie 3 ga innsikt i de relasjonelle konsekvensene av at utøverne opplevde treneren som en stressfaktor og en potensiell forstyrrelse for prestasjon, og hvordan utøvere på dette nivået kan anvende sin opparbeidede makt til å distansere seg fra trener (stressfaktor) for å opprettholde kontroll over prestasjon. Resultatene i studie 4 viste at grunnpremisset for trenernes samhandling med utøverne var erkjennelsen av at deres egen oppfatning av en situasjon ikke nødvendigvis representerte den eneste virkeligheten eller det riktige svaret. Videre var det å bygge gode relasjoner med utøverne på mange måter en buffer mot forstyrrelser og mot at det ble tatt unødvendig risiko i en kontekst som allerede er kjennetegnet av uforutsigbarhet. I studie 5 viste det seg at begge dyadene opplevde kvalitet i kommunikasjonsprosessen som avgjørende for å bygge og opprettholde relasjonskvalitet. Begge dyadene opplevde også kvaliteten på kommunikasjonen som en avgjørende prestasjonsfremmende faktor, noe som gjorde at de trente spesifikt på kommunikasjonsprosessen for å være optimalt forberedt til konkurranse.

Konklusjon: Til sammen viser funnene i denne avhandlingen noe av kompleksiteten i relasjonsdynamikken i trener-utøverrelasjonen på verdenstoppnivå, og hvilke underliggende psykologiske mekanismer som kan påvirke denne dynamikken. Flere teoretiske rammeverk og begreper bidro med nyttige og viktige perspektiver for å forklare og diskutere resultatene, og med dette verdifulle synspunkter på hva som foregår i trener-utøverrelasjonen og hvordan dette påvirker relasjonskvaliteten og prestasjonene til trenere og utøvere på det absolutt høyeste nivået i idrett.

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List of Papers

Paper I: Frøyen, A. F., Pensgaard, A. M. (2014). Antecedents of need fulfilment among elite athletes and coaches. A qualitative approach. *International Journal of Applied Sports Sciences,* 26(1), 26-41.

Paper II: Frøyen, A. F., Pensgaard, A. M., & Gustafsson, H. (2020). «You can be my coach, but I am the one in charge» An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the importance of the coach-athlete relationship in Norwegian super-elite athletes. *International Journal of Applied Sports Sciences,* 32(1), 49-68.

Paper III: Frøyen, A. F., Pensgaard, A. M., & Gustafsson, H. Making athletes feel safe and secure: An IPA of two serial winning coaches. (manuscript).

Paper IV: Frøyen, A. F., Pensgaard, A. M., & Gustafsson, H. The art of communication: An in-depth study of a serial winning coach and two world-class athletes. (manuscript).

Abbreviations

SDT – Self-Determination Theory

BPNT – Basic Psychological Need Theory

RMT – Relationship Motivation Theory

IPA – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

SWC – Serial Winning Coaches

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Appendix

Introduction

The high-performance sport environment (Olympic and professional sport) has been characterized as dynamic, multifaceted, unpredictable, and at times characterised by chaos (Purdy & Jones, 2011). Achieving success in this environment is highly challenging, and repeatedly success in this highly demanding context is the privilege of very few athletes and coaches (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Coaches as well as athletes play important roles in a high-performance context. One key factor to successful coaching is believed to be the quality of the relationship between coaches and athletes (Jowett, 2017). Coaches and athletes are a united entity within the context of coaching, whether it is participation or performance. These two people form a dyadic relationship that contains a great deal of power and enable its members to accomplish their individual and relationship goals. The coach and the athlete need one another to develop, grow, and succeed. Hence, the relationship becomes the mean that motivates, encourages, satisfies, comforts, and supports coaches and athletes to enhance their sport experience. In other words, the relationship and its quality can offer a measure of coaching and its effectiveness (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016)

At the world-class level, coaches and athletes are considered vital stakeholders accountable for producing success in their nation (de Bosscher, Bingham, & Shibli, 2008). The coaches are considered to be performers in their own right (Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, Dieffenbach, & McCann, 2001; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016) because of their responsibility to guide athletes' performance in the international sporting arena, and they are held accountable to produce results (Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010; Mallett, 2010). Their work has become increasingly demanding and complex, displaying alterations in society and sport itself.

Super-elite athletes (gold medallists at the Olympics or World Championships) have not just managed to achieve very high-performance levels, they have also manifested the ability to perform exceptionally well under the extremely challenging conditions faced by other world-class athletes (Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2007; Jones & Hardy, 1990). There is now a growing recognition that there are subtle, yet significant differences between those athletes who win gold at the Olympics and World Championships, and those athletes (elite-athletes) who compete at the international level but who do not achieve medals (Hardy et al., 2017; Rees et al., 2016). For instance, super-elite athletes have, compared to elite-athletes, a raised need for success, and they are more obsessive or perfectionistic regarding their training and performance. They are also more ruthless and selfish in their quest for success, and they place the relative value of sport over other aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships (Güllich et al., 2019; Hardy et al., 2017).

Following the lines of Jowett (2017) argument that coaching effectiveness is at the heart of the coach-athlete relationship, what, then, goes on between coaches and athletes in the highly demanding context of world-class sport? Does the growing recognition of subtle yet decisive differences between Olympic gold medallists and the athletes who compete at the same level, but who do not win medals also apply to the coach-athlete relationship? How well does being ruthless and selfish in their quest for success, and placing the relative importance of sport over interpersonal relationships play with developing a high-quality coach-athlete relationship?

Before we embark on the possible psychological mechanisms and relationship dynamics in coach-athlete relationships at the world-class level, let us take a closer look at the theoretical frameworks applied in this doctoral thesis's studies. As will be seen, the theoretical frameworks are different in the four articles. The use of different theoretical framework is due to the particular interest in the participants' personal stories and the meaning they attach to

these, and thus, the use of IPA as the methodological approach. The framework of IPA and its

theoretical underpinnings will be explained in the methodology chapter. Nevertheless, the

explanation for the articles' different theoretical frameworks is that IPA's primary concern is

the participant's lived experience and the meaning that the participant makes of that lived

experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). A natural consequence of this is that, although

IPA does make formal theoretical connections, this is usually done *after* the textual analysis,

which has its analytical focus on the participants' lived experience (Smith, 2004). Hence, the

theoretical connections are made in the discussion of the results and thus guided by the

findings. In other words, the theoretical frameworks presented for each article is the

theoretical connections the candidate found most suitable to discuss the findings in each

paper.

Theoretical Frameworks

Paper I – Self-Determination Theory

Elite sport is a context where its participants are very much concerned with performance development in aiming for success, and the environment that can be very competitive and likely at times, very stressful. Elite athletes and coaches also often spend more than 150 days together in any one year (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002). Therefore, it is highly relevant that this relationship is effective as the quality of the coach-athlete relationship is essential for the development of performance, satisfaction (Jowett & Meek, 2000), and motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

According to Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), individuals have inherent motivation to participate in meaningful pursuits, seek optimal challenges and new experiences to master, and search for a sense of belonging to other people and social groups (Standage & Ryan, 2020). SDT contains six mini-theories generated to explain different motivationally based phenomena developed from both laboratory and field research. Although each mini-theory was developed to address specific motivational phenomena, they are systematically linked and coordinated by the consolidating concept of basic psychological needs (Standage & Ryan, 2020). The theoretical framework applied in paper I was Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) (Ryan & Deci, 2002), the fourth mini-theory within SDT. However, there will also be a description of the sixth mini-theory, Relationship Motivation Theory (RMT), a more recent included mini-theory as its focus is on relationships.

Basic Psychological Need Theory (BPNT)

BPNT pays specific attention to the concept of innate psychological needs; the need for autonomy, the need for competence and the need for relatedness, and their direct impact on growth, healthy functioning, and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Standage & Ryan, 2020). The

need for autonomy is satisfied when one experiences activities as self-endorsed and follows one's interests and integrated values and, consequently, expresses a part of oneself (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The need for competence makes people seek optimal challenges according to their capacities and interact effectively with the environment. The need for relatedness is satisfied when one feels close, connected, and cared for by others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2002). The feeling of belonging to other people and one's environment is essential as it contributes to the experience of acceptance by one's fellow companions and peers. When these psychological needs are satisfied, people experience more integrated and volitional forms of motivation, more efficient functioning, and heightened well-being. A failure to satisfy any of these needs is expected to display diminished growth, integrity, and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). If these needs are actively thwarted, greater ill-being, passive engagement, limited development, and impoverished functioning are hypothesized (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The psychological needs and proposed associations are argued to be universal, meaning that they have a functional impact irrespective of culture, context, developmental stages, and gender (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004).

The main objective of study 1 and 2 in paper I was to provide, within the framework of BPNT, a more in-depth understanding of the needs elite athletes and coaches have in relation to each other. Research using the theoretical framework of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) to study relationship functioning and need satisfaction in sport was, and still is, primarily centred on how coaches influenced need satisfaction of the basic psychological needs, motivation, and well-being among athletes (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2008; Gillet, Vallerand, Amoura, & Baldes, 2010). However, since the preparation and publication of paper I, there has been developed a new mini-theory within the broader SDT framework that contributes with a theoretical perspective that might prove more relevant for the topic under investigation, the coach-athlete relationship.

Relationship Motivation Theory (RMT)

The latest mini-theory incorporated into the broader SDT framework is Relationship Motivation Theory (RMT) (Deci & Ryan, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The framework of RMT provides a theoretical perspective to include relational aspects with more comprehensive motivation phenomena (Standage & Emm, 2014). At the heart of RMT is the need for relatedness. Relatedness promotes an individual's motivation to engage with others and provides the basis for growth, integrity, and wellness within high-quality relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, the satisfaction of relatedness alone is not sufficient to ensure high-quality relations, relational adjustments, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2014). According to RMT, relationship satisfaction, attachment security, and well-being will be of the highest quality when the needs for autonomy and competence are also supported (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Equally, need thwarting interpersonal factors such as restricted regard, unresponsive interplays, control, focused criticism, and objectification is postulated to produce relationship dysfunction and low-quality relationships due to psychological need frustration (Deci & Ryan, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Consequently, the highest quality and genuine personal relationships are designated as those in which both partners support each other's autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they are both autonomously motivated for social contact within the relationship, and there is a higher degree of mutuality in shared need support among partners (Standage & Ryan, 2020).

The sport setting provide many opportunities to build and sustain significant and close relationships that vary in terms of the authority, degree of mutuality, structure, as well as the developmental stage of individuals within and across contexts (e.g. relationships among peers, coaches and athletes, parents and children) (Standage & Ryan, 2020). Thus, BPNT was considered as a timely and viable theoretical framework when study 1 was conducted.

Although it is a common view that a well-functioning coach-athlete relationship is generally important for good performances, it is also a fact that the coach sometimes can be a

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real source of stress for the athlete (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2000) and if that is the case the athlete has to find a way to deal with that situation.

Paper II

Coping Strategies in an Extreme Environment

Due to the extreme demands within the sport context at the highest level, athletes in elite sport must continuously assess a wide range of potential stressors known to impact both their performance and well-being (Fletcher, Hanton, & Wagstaff, 2012). Early research also helped to reveal that in elite athletes, a high degree of perceived control is vital, concerning both the experience and capability to cope with stress (Edwards & Hardy, 1996; Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998).

Interestingly, it has been shown earlier that elite athletes who experience their coach as a significant stressor also report a resulting lack of control and discontentment with their performance (Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998). Hence, it makes sense that athletes who have reached a superior level will try to take charge of everything that potentially could influence their situation, including their assigned relationship with their coach.

Present research focusing on stress and coping in sport has typically used Lazarus and Folkman (1984) transactional conceptualization of stress (Miles, Neil, & Barker, 2016). Based on this conceptualization, stress is considered as an ongoing transaction between the stressors that arise from the given environment and the resources of the person operating within it, with the process of cognitive appraisal and coping strategies important to how the individual encounters the transactions (Arnold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2017; Miles et al., 2016).

Power

Several researchers have applied Bourdieu's concepts to explore the notion of power in coaching(Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2014; Purdy, Jones, & Cassidy, 2009). Pierre Bourdieu, a highly respected sociologist of our time, is particularly well-known for his work on the concept of power, which has proved to provide a useful framework for research that aims to

increase our understanding of how power works and operates in the context of sport (Cushion & Kitchen, 2011). Most research into power in sport has viewed athletes as relatively passive actors primarily subjected to power (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2014; Johns & Johns, 2000; Jones, Glintmeyer, & McKenzie, 2005). However, research suggests that being the best athlete in an athletic program at the elite level might provide a more advantageous position of power than athletes who are not as good (Purdy et al., 2009).

One of the fundamental concepts in Bourdieu's theory of power is capital. Capital is the capability you have to utilize power over your own and other people's future, and as so, capital is a kind of power (Jenkins, 2014; Ritzer, 1996). According to Bourdieu, society is structured based on variations in capital distribution, and individuals are continually striving to increase their capital. The amount of capital an individual can accumulate has a significant impact on determining the individual's choices. Within sport, the differences in capital distribution can be seen in the fact that coaching takes place within a hierarchical structure. The various forms of power – social, symbolic, cultural, and physical – help create a formal and informal hierarchy and encompass athletes and coaches. In their study of professional youth football, Cushion and Jones (2006) found that each individual's amount of social capital depended on their position in the team of coaches or group of athletes (e.g., head coach/assistant coach, professional athlete/young athlete). Cultural capital was built up through experience and qualifications (e.g., understanding the cultural codes and language), and symbolic capital derived from fame, personal achievements, and prestige. The overall amount of capital held determined the social hierarchy and structure at the club. Purdy and her colleagues (Purdy, Potrac, & Jones, 2008) also found it advantageous to use the concepts of social, physical, and symbolic capital to create an appropriate theoretical framework for the claims and internal struggles within a high-performance environment. As a result, the existence and role of capital in a sporting context is receiving increasing attention (Cushion &

Kitchen, 2011). As achieving results is the explicit aim of elite sport, and the reason for the relationship between the coach and athlete at this level, it is probably also the case that good results at the super-elite level are the most significant contributor to accumulating all of the forms of power, as they represent an objective proof of accomplishment in an extremely demanding and goal-oriented context. Thus, the theoretical framework for the discussion in Paper II provided a sound foundation to discuss the relational outcomes of the coach being perceived as a stressor and the accumulated power as an important resource to cope with that stressor to maintain control over performance.

Paper III – **Psychological Safety**

In paper III there is a shift to the coach` perspective and the focus was on serial winning coaches' interpersonal knowledge and expertise, and what they perceived as essential components in building a collaborative partnership with their athletes. In the discussion of our findings, the concept of psychological safety and its theoretical framework provided a solid perspective which captured the kind of security that emerged as an essential feature of the environmental- and relational conditions the coaches strived to accomplish.

There are various definitions of psychological safety. Still, the one that appears to be most widely accepted is Edmondson's definition, "Psychological safety is the shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 350). One of the characteristics of a psychologically safe working environment is that everyone who works there feels mutual trust and respect. Furthermore, they feel safe that if they step forward by asking questions, reporting problems, raising worries, asking for feedback, or making new proposals, they will not be punished or humiliated in any way (Edmondson, 2019). At the same time, it is essential to realise that the term psychologically safe environment does not refer to a cosy environment without any problems or pressure or where people are not held accountable for their mistakes. On the contrary, people in a psychologically safe environment can entirely focus on achieving their joint goals through

productive and challenging discussions, rather than protecting themselves. (Edmondson, 2019). With the coaches and athletes being regarded key stakeholders accountable for delivering success in their nation (de Bosscher et al., 2008), and with the competition for medals at the Olympic and World Championship escalating (Rees et al., 2016), it is reasonable to argue that they would profit from working in a psychologically safe environment where they can focus entirely on achieving their joint goal of success.

In explaining psychological safety, it is important to clarify how this construct differs from the similar construct of trust. Interpersonal trust has been described as a willingness to be vulnerable to others whose future actions will be desirable to one's interests (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). As with psychological safety, trust involves interpersonal vulnerability aspects that one perceives within the team. However, an essential distinction between these constructs is the direction of this relationship. More specifically, trust focuses on one's willingness to give another person (e.g., coach) the benefit of the doubt when taking risks. In contrast, psychological safety involves one's perception that those other persons involved will give you the benefit of the doubt (Fransen, McEwan, & Sarkar, 2020; Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan, & Vracheva, 2017).

A meta-study from 2014 found that psychological safety has the most significant impact on groups and teams that are solving complex tasks that require a high degree of coordination and collaboration between the group members, as they are dependent on each other for success (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). The elite sport context is marked as both complex, unpredictable, dynamic, and highly demanding, where one cannot achieve success alone (Purdy & Jones, 2011). Thus, it is likely that psychological safety will have a beneficial impact in this environment as well. The same meta-study found that, although all group members helped make the group psychologically safe, the leader occupied a unique position. The leader's behaviour and reactions when the members dared to express their thoughts

openly and honestly were crucial for developing psychological safety. There is also a recognition that, in the demanding context of elite sport, coaches play a particularly important role because they have chief responsibility for both the training process and the athletes' performances (Mallett, 2010). Equally, a coach's effectiveness depends on interaction, both between individuals and within the group as a whole. To succeed, the coach must regularly interact with athletes, the support staff, and other professionals (Gilbert & Côté, 2013). Despite the similarities between the organisational environments where psychological safety has proved to be the most effective and elite sports characteristics, psychological safety is a relatively new concept within sports research (Fransen et al., 2020). Still, in a season-long ethnographic study with a high-level rugby team, Morgan, Fletcher, and Sarkar (2019) found that fostering a team identity and psychologically safe environment in contrast to an environment where the team members blame each other was vital for team resilience improvement. Another study has investigated the role of psychological safety in explaining identity leadership's influence on team performance and athlete well-being in handball (Fransen et al., 2020). The results revealed that psychological safety acted as a mediator between identity leadership and good teamwork, which promoted team resilience and improved athletes' satisfaction with their team performance. The results also showed that psychological safety protected against athletes' burnout, whereby improving their health.

Paper IV – Empathic Accuracy and Communication

In the last paper, we explored in detail the communication in two coach-athlete dyads, its perceived purpose and the meaning they attached to their communication. In the discussion of our findings, the concept of empathic accuracy and communication provided us with interesting perspectives in our quest to understand better the complex and dynamic interplay of communication in coach-athlete relationships.

Empathic accuracy is about "the accuracy of ongoing moment-to-moment inferences regarding the psychological state of another individual" (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013, p. 325). In

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other words, it is the ability to understand another person's ever-changing thoughts, feelings, and aims in continuing situations. Empathic accuracy is recognized as vital to flourishing social interplay (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013).

An underlying factor that influences empathetic accuracy is the degree to which the people involved are driven to reach sound conclusions about their partner's thoughts and feelings (Thomas & Fletcher, 1997). A high level of motivation to obtain empathetic accuracy in a relationship is particularly seen when the parties believe that a lot is at stake. For example, this may be in relationships where a high degree of mutual dependency develops over time, or where the parties want to accomplish something imperative to them (Bissonnette, Rusbult, & Kilpatrick, 1997). There is also a connection between empathetic accuracy and how positively coaches and athletes consider their relationship and how content they are with their training. Consequently, empathic accuracy is argued to contribute to positive outcomes of the relationship and support more effective and successful coach-athlete relationships (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009).

An essential first step to improve empathetic accuracy is to give time and opportunity for conversations and social interaction between the coach and athlete. Opportunity for development of empathic accuracy may imply extended training sessions, with the coach being available before and after training, or lessening what needs to be included in a training session (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009).

Another recommendation to increase accuracy is that the coach and athlete work proactively to develop a shared understanding of each other by exploring various ways of communicating (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013). Communication is the process by which a coach and athlete exchange information (LaVoi, 2007). Genuinely acknowledging the power of effective communication in influencing thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and hence performances is a crucial aspect of successful coaching (Cherubini, 2019).

In coaching, the communication process can best be described as dynamic, reciprocal, and complex, and it is often dependent on the continuous interplay between content and context (Cherubini, 2019). There are various forms of communication, such as written, oral, non-verbal, and visual. Also, communication occurs in various contexts, such as one-to-one, small groups, and with the whole team present. The constant emotional fluctuations in competitive sport are also vital in the communication process (Yukelson, 2015).

For a long time, active listening has been recognised as an essential skill for improving communication processes. It helps to avoid misunderstandings and helps coaches reach more accurate conclusions and better understand their athletes (Cherubini, 2019; Yukelson, 2015). For a coach, actively listening involves interacting closely with the athlete by noticing their body language, being mindful in conversations, and summarising and clarifying anything that appears unclear in the interaction (Cherubini, 2019). A coach's ability to respond positively (e.g., being reassuring, calm, patient, supportive) to athletes who have experienced an undesired or negative situation has also positively influenced the future interaction between the coach and athlete (Sagar & Jowett, 2012). When information is sent and received in an emotionally charged atmosphere, it is important to acknowledge the emotion's existence, accept it, and appropriately channel its strength (Breakey, Jones, Cunningham, & Holt, 2009). Given that communication between the coach and athlete is a reciprocal process, both the coach and athlete's emotions will affect how a message is communicated, received, and understood (Yukelson, 2015).

Coaches' ability to understand their non-verbal communication's impact should not be underrated (Anshel, 2012; LaVoi, 2007). Body language such as head and hand movements, attitude, eye contact, and facial expressions is often more influential than verbal communication in displaying the intensity of feelings, locus of attention, and sincerity of emotions. Moreover, the volume, character, and tone of one's voice can influence how

effective communication is, as these forms of non-verbal communication are often indications of underlying emotions (Anshel, 2012; Cherubini, 2019).

Purpose of the Studies and Research Questions

The overreaching purpose of this doctoral thesis was to investigate the psychological mechanisms and relationship dynamics in the coach-athlete relationship at the world-class level in-depth with a particular focus on the participants' personal experiences and meaning-making. As previously mentioned, the development that evolved between the different studies also led to the inclusion of different theoretical framework to discuss the findings.

Study 1 and study 2 were grounded in the theoretical perspective of BPNT within the SDT framework. The aim of the studies was to gain a more in-depth understanding of the needs which athletes and coaches have in relation to each other. Hence, the research questions were;

Research Question 1A (Study 1, Paper I): How do highly elite athletes experience need satisfaction within their collaboration with their coach?

Research Question 1B (Study 2, Paper I): How do elite coaches perceive their athletes to influence them, and what do they recognize as supportive athlete behaviour?

Due to the methodological changes that will be further explained in the methodology chapter, the aims in paper II, III and IV were broader and exploratory;

Research Question 2 (Study 3, Paper II)

Explore underlying dynamics that influence athletes' perception of what constitutes an effective coach-athlete relationship.

Research Question 3 (Study 4, Paper III)

Explore the interpersonal knowledge of Serial Winning Coaches (SWC) and how they used their expertise in this field to build a collaborative partnership with their athletes.

Research Question 4 (Study 5, Paper IV)

To investigate in detail the use of communication, its meaning and purpose in coach-athlete dyads.

Methodology

In many ways, conducting this doctoral thesis has been a methodological journey from the hermeneutic perspective as the methodological lens in paper I, to the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in paper II, III, and IV. In this chapter, I will describe this journey by first presenting the theory of hermeneutics. Then I present my personal experiences and development that resulted in the change of methodology to IPA before I explain IPA's theoretical underpinnings. Since hermeneutics also is one of the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, I focus mostly on its foundation in phenomenology in this section. I then give a brief description of the participants in each of the studies and the initial procedures, before I provide information on how we collected the data and the process of analysis within the IPA framework. In the end, I explain important guidelines for judging quality in qualitative research and how these were applied in our studies before I discuss some methodological concerns related to IPA.

Hermeneutics

The purpose of hermeneutics is to explore how we read and understand texts (Thiselton, 2009). As a theory of interpretation, hermeneutics has a lengthy history, rising as the theory to help interpret biblical texts and then progressively extending its concerns with interpreting a much more comprehensive range of texts. Still, while the range of texts that employ hermeneutics has expanded considerably beyond those of the bible, its primary concern is the humanities like law, literature, the arts, and history.

Despite its traditional use within the humanities, Smith (2007) argues that human sciences, like psychology, also can benefit from using hermeneutic theory when concerned with qualitative analysis of textual material acquired from human agents even though there are significant differences between the texts that initially offered hermeneutics its challenges and the texts obtained in contemporary psychological research.

Within the humanities, hermeneutics is traditionally applied to texts composed for a public purpose and written in another time or with a historical distance to the analyst (Smith, 2007). By contrast, in human science, researchers talk to the participant in real-time and record and transcribe the resultant conversation and then analyse it. This text is explicitly about the person's personal experience and not produced as a public document. The text would not exist if it were not for the researcher's invitation, and there is an absence of historical or other distance between author and interpreter (Smith, 2007).

The hermeneutic circle is a fundamental element in hermeneutic theory and debates for the dynamic relations between the part and the whole. To understand the part, you look at the whole; to understand the whole you look to the part, and this dynamic interplay exist at various levels (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009).

Perhaps the most comprehensively discussed hermeneutic circle is the relationship between different aspects of the text the interpreter is interpreting. For example, the meaning of a word only becomes apparent when seen in the whole sentence. Simultaneously, the meaning of the sentence depends upon the cumulative meaning of the individual words, and the meaning of a single paragraph becomes clear when seen as a part of a whole text, while the meaning of the whole text becomes clear in light of the collective paragraphs (Smith et al., 2009). From a logical viewpoint, the hermeneutic circle has undergone critique because of its internal circularity. However, in analytical terms, the hermeneutic circle describes the interpretation process very effectively and speaks to a dynamic, non-linear thinking, and analysis style. Still, because this hermeneutic circle theoretically could proceed forever, at one point, the interpreter needs to be pragmatic and decide that the interpretation is good enough and that it is time to come out of the circle to commit oneself to the (further/subsequent) writing process (Smith, 2007).

Another highly relevant hermeneutic circle is the one which illustrates the relationship between the interpreter and the target of interpretation (the participant). An important aspect in relation to this hermeneutic circle is the role of preconceptions. An interpretation is never separated or freed from our preconceptions (Smith et al., 2009). The analyst brings his/her preconceptions in terms of prior experiences and assumptions to the encounter and cannot help but look at any new stimulus in the light of their own previous experiences. The influence of preconceptions, prior knowledge, and expertise is particularly evident as the interpreter enters the hermeneutic circle on one point. Moving from the starting point, the interpreter tries to bracket or at least acknowledge their preconceptions before initiating an encounter with a research participant (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). At this point on the circle, the participant is the focus of attention as the interpreter attempts to facilitate the participant revealing his/her experience. When concluded the conversation, the interpreter continues back to the starting point of the circle. However, although still influenced by the preconceptions, the interpreter is irreversibly altered because of the encounter with the participant and his/her story.

However, while fore-structure may ontologically precede encounter with the participant or the text, understanding may work the other way (Smith, 2007). When encountering, you do not necessarily know which piece of your fore-structure is pertinent. Having engaged with the text or participant, you may then be better positioned to understand what your fore-structure is. Rather than putting your preconceptions upfront before interpreting, you may only begin to see some of your fore-understandings as you strive to understand the meaning of what this person is saying or the writing in a text. However, that awareness of the fore-understandings may also pass as the interpretation process changes the fore-understandings to new ones. This continuous process of new projection frames the act of

understanding and interpretation as it involves constant movement back and forth, for it is always open to revision and supplementation (Smith et al., 2009).

My personally most important journey around in the hermeneutic circles

My fore-understanding/preconceptions articulated in paper I; *The preliminary understanding or starting point of this study was an interest in the importance of need satisfaction within the coach-athlete relationship in elite sport that emerged through previous work also grounded in self-determination theory* (Froyen & Pensgaard, 2014).

Based on this text's content, it is clear that the theoretical perspective of self-determination theory and my perception of the usefulness of analysing the data according to this framework guided my preconception. However, through the analyses of article 1, my preconception related to the application of self-determination theory changed. It became clear to me that by using self-determination theory as a theoretical framework I could not convey the complexity and the nuances I experienced being present in the data. Article 1 is interesting, as the results illuminate how coaches and athletes can contribute to each other's basic psychological needs. Nevertheless, I experienced that what the participants communicated through their stories and experiences was not interpreted sufficiently on their terms because they had to be analysed in the light of self-determination theory.

From January 2013 to December 2016, I also worked full time as a sport psychologist at the Norwegian Olympic Training Center, called Olympiatoppen. Olympatoppen is where the Norwegian elite athletes and their coaches train and receive support from sport science experts. The experiences I gained during those years also altered my preunderstanding of the coach-athlete relationship. Before I started in this job, my preconception was coloured be a perception that relationship quality in the coach-athlete relationship was characterised by harmony and positive emotions, and relatively free from friction and disagreements. During my years at Olympiatoppen and in the elite sport context, I had many conversations with

athletes, coaches, support staff, and colleagues. I also gave lectures on the coach-athlete relationship and other topics in sport psychology. Through all these interactions, I gained insight into what the people in different roles were concerned about, what was important to them, what disturbed/disrupted them, varieties in perceptions and considerations related to the coach-athlete relationship, and performance development, to name a few.

Being part of the elite sport context and all the interactions effected my preconception of the coach-athlete relationship in the sense that it opened my eyes to the variety of relationship dynamics that existed, but where the parties still experienced the relationship as a reliable and effective partnership. I was particularly marked by the impact the performance requirements had on the relationship. The profound urge/desire to develop and perform and the extreme demands for quality in everything that could affect this, I experienced, substantially impacted on their perception of what was important in the relationship and what characterized good relationship dynamics and relationship quality. Simultaneously, it became clear to me that the participants' stories and experiences had to be the focus of the analysis. It became necessary to free myself from a predefined theoretical framework when I was to interpret the interviews because it limited the interpretation and the opportunities to bring out what could be important details and nuances in the data material (Smith et al., 2009).

The changes in my preconception based on my experience from working with article 1 and being part of the elite sport context at Olympiatoppen made me realise I had to put aside or bracket out my previous preconceptions about the coach-athlete relationship and theoretical frameworks, and instead, opening up to what the participants' in the world-class sport context were trying to convey (Smith et al., 2009). To fulfil this intention and to attain a more phenomenological approach, I decided to change the methodology from hermeneutics in Paper I to Interpretative Phenomenological Analyses (IPA) in Paper II, III, and IV.

IPA is theoretically rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. By making this methodological change, I sustained the hermeneutics and the importance of recognizing the interpretation process when analyzing data. At the same time, I included the theoretical perspective of phenomenology that elucidates the importance of focusing on the participant's experiences related to a phenomenon; in this case, the coach-athlete relationship. Besides, through the idiography, IPA embraces the value of emphasizing details and the specifics in what the participant is telling.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a qualitative methodology that originated in the field of psychology. Using an idiographic approach with its theoretical foundation in phenomenology and hermeneutics, IPA can provide a unique insight into personal meaning-making (Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Several theoretical positions within phenomenological philosophy provide IPA's phenomenological foundation (Smith et al., 2009). Particularly apparent is, however, Husserl and his interest in finding the essence of experience. However, in IPA, this aspect is altered to capture particular experiences for specific people (Smith et al., 2009). From Heidegger, the most notable contribution to IPA is acknowledging that meaning-making inevitably entails an interpretative process for both the participant and the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2015). On this subject, the IPA's theoretical grounding in hermeneutics also displays apparent as the researcher tries to make sense of the participant's attempt to make sense of their experiences, suggesting a double hermeneutics. Based on this foundation, it is of particular concern within IPA that there is a close link between the participant's account and the researcher's interpretive analysis (Smith, 2017). The idiographic grounds can be seen in IPA's focus on specifics, and is especially apparent in two areas; a focus on details and in-depth analysis. The researcher has to recognise how a specific group of people has interpreted an experiential phenomenon in a specific context. The sharp focus on details and in-depth

analyses is also the foremost reason why IPA accentuates that there should be small strategic samples in studies that use IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

The multiperspectival IPA designs

The multiperspectival IPA design used in paper IV also maintain its influential links to phenomenology and hermeneutical concepts (Larkin, Shaw, & Flowers, 2019). However, the multiperspectival designs also form links to concepts from systemic psychology. The grounding in systemic psychology is particularly evident in IPA's concern with the function of language, even though it is not fundamentally defined or fixed by that interest. IPA and systemic theory also share the view that a third person can understand different personal viewpoints of the world, focusing on patterns of meaning-making, given that one begins from the belief that each perspective elucidates an essential aspect of a shared reality (Larkin et al., 2019). Multiperspectival IPA also maintains a dedication to idiography in data collection and analysis but extends this by linking two or more essential perspectives, allowing the researcher to analyse the relational and intersubjective/reciprocal, and microsocial dimensions of a given phenomenon (Larkin et al., 2019).

Participants

The Norwegian Olympic Training Centre provided access to all the participants. Both coaches and athletes were selected based on accomplishments in the world-class sport. The criteria for inclusion of athletes was that they should have two or more medals from the Olympics, World championships, or competitions at a comparable level. The coaches all had comprehensive coaching experience working with athletes at the world-class level, and thus met the criteria of being serial winning coaches.

Paper I. Study 1: The group of participants consisted of six retired athletes (four females, two males). Five of them had competed in individual sports, and one athlete had competed in team sports. Together they had won 17 medals from the Olympics, 8 of them

were gold medals. They had also achieved 48 medals from world championships, 23 of them were gold medals, and 8 medals from European championships, 4 of which were gold medals.

Study 2: Four male coaches participated in the study. They were resigned as elite coaches but were still engaged in elite sport in various positions. One coach had only trained female athletes at the highest level, while one coach had only trained male athletes. Two of the coaches had trained both females and males at the highest level. They had 22-30 years of coaching experience (mean = 20 years).

Paper II. The focus of this study was the athlete perspective on the coach-athlete relationship. The participants in this study were, therefore, two male athletes in individual sports. They competed at the world-class level over an extended period, and they both hold Olympic gold medals. They were retired from their athletic careers at the time of the interviews.

Paper III. To explore the coach perspective on the coach-athlete relationship, two serial-winning coaches were recruited to this study. One of the coaches was male and coached an individual sport. The other coach was female and coached a team sport. They both coached athletes who had won several gold medals in the Olympics, world-championships, and other major championships. They were professional, full-time coaches during their careers, but had withdrawn from that position when the interviews took place.

Paper IV. The aim of the last paper was to study, in-depth, the communication process in the coach-athlete relationship as it was perceived from both sides. Thus, we wanted to conduct a dyadic study. Because the study's purpose was to gain insight, focusing on details and nuances, we designed the study with one serial-winning coach (male) and two of his athletes (one female and one male). In this way, we could compare the two dyads' communication process and gain insight into how a coach adapts his communication to the individual athlete. Both athletes were still active and performed at the world-class level when

the interviews took place. They had trained with this coach their whole career at this level and competed in an individual sport.

Procedures

An invitation to participate in the study, an information letter, and an informed consent form (see appendix I) were sent by post or by e-mail to the participants. It was emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw if they wished without giving any reasons. It was also stressed that the interviews would be handled confidentially. To warrant confidentiality, we changed the athletes' and coaches' names to "athlete"/"coach" and a number (e.g., athlete 1 or coach 1). However, there was still a possibility that the participants could be identified indirectly because of their careers. Thus, the publication would only be done with their approval. All the studies received ethical approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) (reference nr: 23302; see appendix II).

Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews

IPA researchers' primary concern is to obtain rich, detailed, and first-person descriptions of experiences and phenomena under investigation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher and the participant to join in a real-time dialogue. They also provide flexibility for unique and unforeseen matters to arise, which the researcher may investigate in more depth with additional questions.

All the data for the studies were attained through the use of semi-structured interviews (Smith et al., 2009) (see appendix III). Semi-structured interviews are a flexible procedure in which the schedule is a guide that can cover ideas about how best to phrase the questions and how best to move from generic subjects to more particular ones. In conducting a semi-structured interview, it is essential to use the schedule flexibly. The most important thing at the outset of the interview is to establish a rapport with the participant. They need to be at ease with you, and to trust you. Unless you succeed in building this rapport, you will probably

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not gain valuable data from your participant. When a connection is established, and the interview progresses, there is likely to be a move from the descriptive, general, and superficial to the more emotional, particular, and disclosing (Smith et al., 2009).

Study 1, 2 (paper I), 3 (paper II), and 4 (paper III) was a part of a larger project where we conducted interviews covering several psychological aspects related to performance in world-class sport, including the coach-athlete relationship. We developed one interview guide for the athletes and one interview guide for the coaches. This despite the fact that study 1 and study 2 (paper I) related differently to theory than the rest of the studies. The interview guide questions were nevertheless open-ended to promote an interaction that enabled the participants to tell their stories in their terms.

It was first and foremost in the analyses that the differences between studies 1 and 2 and the other studies became evident as the analysis of studies 1 and 2 had a deductive approach according to the tenets of BPNT. The analysis of studies 3 and 4 (papers II and III), on the other hand, had an inductive approach based on the theoretical framework of IPA. All these interviews were retrospective, and the participants were interviewed once.

The interview guides for study 5 (paper IV) were specifically developed around the topic of the coach-practitioner relationship. First, we developed one interview guide for the athletes and one interview guide for the coach. Once these interviews were completed and transcribed, the transcript formed the basis for developing the interview guides for each dyadic interview. These interview guides were still semi-structured with open-ended questions, but the questions were based on what they had said in the first interviews. The purpose of this interview guide was the attempt to get even more into the experiences and thoughts that appeared during the personal interviews.

Analysis

Study 1 and 2 (Paper I) within the hermeneutic tradition

Due to the use of hermeneutics as the methodological framework in study 1 and 2 (Paper I), the analytical process in these studies was different than in the subsequent studies where IPA was the chosen analytical lens. Since the purpose of the studies in Paper I was to illuminate how athletes and coaches contribute to each other's need satisfaction, the first step in the analysis of study 1 was to identify the athletes' needs in relation to their coach. The identified needs represented the higher-order themes and expressed the antecedents of need satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Based on their content, the different antecedents were further encoded based on the basic need to which they were assumed to contribute.

As the hermeneutic circle operates on different levels, it was emphasised that the understanding of each statement gave meaning within the interview text and that the interview text gave meaning to each statement, thereby linking the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts (Smith, 2007). It was also emphasised that the understanding of the higher-order themes gave meaning to the existing theory and that the existing theory gave meaning to each higher-order themes, describing a whole and parts at another level.

The analysis of study 2 was conducted in the same manner as in study 1, with the only difference that in this study, the coaches'needs related to their athletes represented the higher-order themes.

Study 3-5 (Paper II, III, and IV) within the IPA tradition

As with many other procedures in qualitative psychology, the heart of IPA lies in its analytical focus. In IPA's case, that focus leads our analytical awareness toward our participants' attempt to make sense of their experiences. To give an account of the analytical process, IPA provides four analytical steps; 1) Reading and re-reading 2) Initial noting, 3) Developing emergent themes, and 4) Searching for connections across emergent themes

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(Smith et al., 2009). However, these are not assigned to present a definitive account, but rather to help the researcher recognize what underlies those steps (Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2009).

Step 1: The first step of analysis primarily involves familiarising ourselves with the transcript to gain a thorough knowledge of the participant. Repeated reading of the transcript is essential to ensure that the participant becomes the focus of the analysis.

Step 2: Following the first step of familiarizing with the data, a more thorough textual analysis takes place, focusing on the participant's thoughts and experiences related to the phenomenon under study. Here the primary aim is to compose comprehensive details and commentaries to the data (Smith & Osborn, 2003). These exploratory annotations highlight IPA's phenomenological perspective. The analytical focus is aimed at the participant's detailed accounts and how they attempt to attach meaning to their feelings and experiences. The interpretations made at this stage of the analysis are based on the participant's statements, not on any theoretical models or frameworks, and provide the next step's foundation (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Step 3: The process of identifying the emergent themes involves focusing on various parts of the transcript without losing sight of the overall picture provided by the initial notes. This dual focus aims to identify the main themes that emerge while also keeping hold of the previous analyses' complexity and interconnections. This part of the analytical process is a good illustration of the hermeneutical circle. What has beforehand been analysed as a whole is split into several parts before being reconstructed as a different whole before the last analysis and presentation of the results. To accomplish the production and presentation of the results, the researcher should focus on stitching together the emergent themes and creating a structure that would allow you to get across what you consider to be the most interesting and vital aspect of what the participants have emphasized in their stories (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

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Step 4: The entire process is replicated for each case. In the final step of the analysis, you search for patterns in the cases by looking at their similarities and dissimilarities.

The Analysis of Multiperspectival IPA Designs

The multiperspectival IPA design used in Paper IV is more complicated than the traditional IPA design. The analysis does begin with a traditional idiographic procedure. However, in multiperspectival designs, the analytical process continues by incorporating the analysis within samples and between samples (Larkin et al., 2019). After examining each personal case, the researcher continues the investigation by moving outward to proceed with the analysis on a larger sample group or dyad, and then further between and across samples (Larkin et al., 2019).

Quality and Validity in Qualitative Research

It is of vital importance that researchers using qualitative methods take the subject of quality and validity seriously. However, there has been considerable discussion about the assessment of quality and validity in qualitative research (Smith, 2011). Concerning qualitative research in general and to IPA in particular, Smith (2011) supports the development of guidelines for judging the quality of qualitative work. Still, Smith claims that this kind of assessment always will be a matter of subjectivity. Different guidelines have been developed to assess quality and validity in qualitative research. A set of guidelines that are claimed to provide a diversity of ways of ascertaining quality, while at the same time can be used regardless of the particular theoretical orientation of a qualitative study are Yardley's (2000) criteria; sensitivity to context, commitment, and rigor, and transparency and coherence, which also were applied in this thesis.

Sensitivity to Context

Researchers using qualitative methods should begin displaying sensitivity to context in the onset of the research process (Smith et al., 2009). There are various ways to demonstrate this kind of sensitivity. In this project, it was especially important to show sensitivity to

context in the project's preparation phase, considering that the participants in this study had long been part of the elite sport context. In Norway, the group of athletes performing at a world-class level is very small, and most of them are well-known people who receive many requests about participating in various projects. Many of them are also familiar with the media and interviewed by journalists interested in their sports career and private lives. We considered that this could impact both their desire to participate in the project and what they were possibly willing to share during the interview. We were, therefore, particularly careful to emphasize that participation in the project would be confidential. They could also choose where the interview was conducted, as it was vital that they felt safe and relaxed during the interview.

The candidate also invested considerable time preparing for each interview by collecting thorough background information on each participant's athletic career. The candidate's preparation for each interview was a token of respect that they took the time to participate in the project and share their story. The candidate also had ample experience in conducting interviews. Collecting rich data requires a close awareness of the interview process, which is another aspect of being sensitive to context. The interviewer needs to be empathic, recognize possible difficulties in the communication, and accommodate the potential powerplay that can arise when a research expert meets an experiential expert (Smith et al., 2009). The candidate's previous experience of conducting interviews and adequate preparation in advance of the interviews provided us with valuable data, except in two cases. In one case, it became apparent during the interview that the participant was not comfortable sharing her story related to the coach-athlete relationship. Her hesitation was expressed through a change in body language as the participant suddenly appeared uncomfortable in the situation. The response to the questions also changed character from fluent and relaxed to very short without elaborating further. When the candidate registered this apparent hesitation,

she chose to omit the questions related to the coach-athlete relationship in the interview out of respect and ethical consideration. Unfortunately, this meant that the interview could not be included further in this doctoral project. In the second case, the entire interview was conducted, and the participant answered all the questions benevolently. Nevertheless, the candidate recognized that it was difficult to build sufficient rapport, and the participant was not willing to elaborate on his experiences to a particularly great extent. This experience led to valuable reflections between the candidate and the main supervisor on possible explanations for why the candidate failed to build sufficient trust in the interview. In this case, a possible explanation was that the participant during his career periodically was under a great deal of media pressure and was very ambivalent toward journalists. Even though a research interview is different from a media interview, talking to a stranger in an interview situation without actually saying anything might be a way to protect yourself. Since an IPA analysis is only as good as the data it is derived from (Smith et al., 2009), this interview was also dismissed from further analysis. Still, both cases were a valuable experience for the candidate and the need to be sensitive to context.

Sensitivity to the context was also displayed in the papers by presenting a substantial number of verbatim extracts from the raw data material to strengthen our arguments and allowing the reader to review the interpretations being made (Smith et al., 2009).

Commitment and Rigour

Demonstration of commitment is, in IPA studies, expressed both in the degree of awareness to the participant during data collection and the care with which each case's analysis is carried out (Smith et al., 2009). Regarding commitment in the form of attentiveness to the participant during the interview, there is an overlap in how IPA applies Yardley's criteria as showing commitment mean the same as showing sensitivity to context. To show personal commitment means taking experiential qualitative research seriously,

realizing it necessitates particular skills, and attempting to realize those skills (Smith et al., 2009). In this doctoral thesis, in addition to demonstrating sensitivity to context, a commitment was shown in the form of continuous dialogue and peer debriefing in the period of data collection. Besides, both the candidate and supervisor listened to the audio files after the interviews and read all the transcripts. These were then the subject of discussion, reflection, and debriefing afterward.

Rigour refers to the thoroughness of the study. Managing a high-quality interview and the completeness of the analysis is thus an illustration of rigour (Yardley, 2000). In the analysis, rigour is demonstrated by conducting a thorough and systematic analysis with sufficient idiographic commitment. The analysis must also be sufficiently interpretive in the sense that it tells the reader something mattering about the participants and something significant about the themes they share (Smith et al., 2009). The steps of analysis steps outlined by Smith et al. (2009) are not intended to be prescriptions but instead referred to as guidelines (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2010). The analysis in this doctoral thesis did use the provided IPA analytical steps as guidelines to ensure that the analyses were carried out thoroughly. Peer-debriefing with supervisors and co-authors was also extensively used to provide rigor in the sense that the interpretations were in line with the purpose of IPA that the researcher should try to make sense of the participant making sense of their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Transparency and Coherence

Transparency refers to how precisely the stages of the research process are described in the write-up of the study (Smith et al., 2009). Relevant stages include the participants' inclusion criteria, descriptions of the interview process, and what steps are used in the analysis.

Coherence refers to the degree of fit between the research done and the implemented approach's underlying theoretical assumptions. Coherence is linked to proposed knowledge claims (Smith & McGannon, 2018) and reflects how the interpretations and results are justified and presented. Elements considered might be the presentation of contextual information, believability, novelty, contribution to the literature, applied importance, or ethics (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Coherence justified in the present doctoral thesis is access to and experiences from the field of world-class sport, ethical considerations, and approval, and extensive use of peer-debriefing discussions. The studies' write-up was also drafted and re-drafted to ensure that the arguments presented were coherent and that ambiguities and discrepancies were dealt with.

Methodological Concerns

This Ph. D. project's overall motive was to gain more insight and knowledge about relational dynamics and relational quality in the coach-athlete relationship in the unique context that world-class sport is. The relationship between coach and athlete is the relationship that is considered to have the most relational significance for athletes (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016), and this project intended to investigate further whether even small differences in this relationship might impact performance and possibly other outcome variables. This motive was also governing when we decided to change the method from hermeneutics and a theory-driven approach to IPA and thereby focus as much as possible on bringing out the participants' experiences and perspectives. It would probably have been easier to carry out all the studies within a theoretical framework or model. Still, we considered that it was of greater research interest to let the participants' perspectives, opinions, and experiences in this unique context be in the forefront, regardless of theoretical frameworks and models. In practice, this meant being true to IPA in the analysis process where one analyses and interprets in detail each case where the intention is to try to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them (Smith, 2018). In this context,

the participants have unique knowledge and expertise that is of great value to convey. At the same time, it is our job as researchers to put these experiences and expertise into a theoretical perspective by identifying concepts and theories that can anchor and explain these experiences. As we see it, IPA captures both the participants' unique experiences and expertise in that this is the focus of the analysis process and the researcher's job of putting these into a theoretical perspective by discussing the results of the analysis process to relevant theory afterward. Nevertheless, there were times I experienced a loss of theoretical control. By focusing only on interpreting the participants' meaning-making in the analysis process, we did not have a clear idea of which theoretical frameworks or concepts would be relevant to discuss the findings afterward theoretically. Still, despite the loss of control in the process, and that the total scope of theoretical frameworks is relatively broad, we believe that this was the right decision to stay true to the intention of gaining insight into the participants' experiences and perspectives being part of this exclusive group of athletes and coaches at the highest level of elite sport.

The candidate, the main supervisor and the co-supervisor have spent considerable time with elite-level athletes and coaches, and both the supervisors have several years of experience working with athletes and coaches at the world-class level. As researchers, we should always acknowledge that we bring our prior experiences and preconceptions to the encounter and that the phenomena under investigation are continuously interpreted in light of these. While preconceptions may hinder the process of letting the person or the text to speak freely, they might also represent a path into the new (Kolnes, 2016). We recognise that our past experiences and perceptions unavoidably influence our perceptions. My preconceptions being a hindrance for letting the transcribed text to speak freely was something I encountered in the analytical process of study 1 and 2 (Paper I) when I, by using the theoretical framework of SDT could not express the complexity and the nuances I experienced being present in the

data. However, during my personally most important journey around in the hermeneutic circles (described above), I did feel the changes in my preconceptions represented a path into the new. The changes in my preconceptions, based on my experience analysing study 1 and 2 (Paper I) and my time working at Olympiatoppen, made me realise that to fulfil the overall purpose of this thesis and also my personal ambition to gain in-depth and detailed insight into the experiences of world-class athletes and coaches, my analytical focus had to be on understanding the participants' views and to explore their meaning-making of important events and processes, regardless of theoretical frameworks (Smith et al., 2009).

I believe that IPA as a methodology indeed was the right choice for the three of the papers in this Ph.D. project as IPA's purpose is to "investigate how individuals make sense of their experiences" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8). Nevertheless, I am also aware that IPA has been the subject of some criticism. This critique is mainly directed at IPA's theoretical grounding in phenomenology (van Manen, 2017, 2018). According to Smith et al. (2009), several theoretical positions within phenomenological philosophy provide IPA's phenomenological foundation. Especially apparent is, however, Husserl and his concern about finding the essence of experience. Still, in IPA, this aspect is modified to capture particular experiences as experienced for specific people (Smith et al., 2009). The criticism of van Manen (2017, 2018) is in most part directed at IPA's modification of phenomenology, where he claims that an IPA study that is inspired by phenomenology but does not strive for phenomenological outcomes should not be evaluated as a phenomenological research study, but a psychological one. When individuals make sense of their personal experiences, they engage in psychological sense-making and reflection and not phenomenology, which is the study of the primal, lived, prereflective, prepredicative meaning of an experience (van Manen, 2017). Smith (2018), on his side, points to the wide range of positions adopted by different phenomenological theorists, and thus, does not think it is helpful to be overly prescriptive

about what is and what is not phenomenological. All the various phenomenological theorists share a core concern with letting experience appear in its own terms. Still, there is an intricate network of convergences and divergences in how they perceive this working. Research drawing on these conceptual references to inform their empirical work should discuss their choices' methodological consequences. However, they cannot claim a single, absolute form of phenomenology because phenomenological philosophy is diversified (Smith, 2018). To emphasize Smith's point, other phenomenologists also do not agree with van Manen's (2017, 2018) understanding of phenomenology (Zahavi, 2019).

The debate between phenomenology and IPA is a debate that likely will continue and potentially have implications, for instance, in the review process of the articles of researchers who conduct IPA studies. When I/we received feedback from reviewers, the common question is, "what is phenomenological about this?". When asked this question, the first question that comes to mind is, "who is asking the question?" Suppose the reviewer is situated within of pure or strict phenomenological tradition. In that case, I know that I probably will not convince him/her with my arguments about the study's anchoring in phenomenology as the themes of an IPA study (no matter its quality) probably will be assessed as superficial and shallow from a purely phenomenological perspective (Smith, 2017; Zahavi, 2019). On the other hand, suppose the reviewer is situated within IPA with its application of phenomenology. In that case, it is an intriguing question because then the feedback and further discussion will be about the study's quality from an IPA perspective as the question is related to the interpretation process of the participant's meaning-making. And that is a discussion that can help me as a researcher to become more proficient in my application of IPA in my studies based on the theoretical foundations laid by those who developed the methodology.

Ethical Concerns

This doctoral thesis' studies were carried out after ethical approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). All participants voluntarily consented to participate after receiving written information about the study, the optional nature of participation, and how the confidentiality was preserved. Due to the participants' outstanding careers in world-class sport, it was emphasized in the information letter that they could indirectly be identified because of their records. The presentation of textual information in a paper is also considered an element related to coherence as a mark of research quality (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Still, due to our obligation to the participants' confidentiality, the contextual information provided in the papers may be considered limited compared to studies conducted with less recognizable participants. In paper 4, the issue of internal confidentiality also came into consideration as it was a dyadic study (Larkin et al., 2019; Ummel & Achille, 2016). Internal confidentiality refers to the possibility that research participants involved in a joint study will be able to identify one another based on published information (Ummel & Achille, 2016). Internal confidentiality is regarded especially important when there is a risk of emotional harm should partakers acquire information about one another that was not planned to share (Morse, 2007). Our study's participants were not considered at risk for emotional harm should internal confidentiality be broken. The participants were also orally informed about the possibility of their statements being recognized by the other participant before the interviews. They had no concerns related to this matter as they were already openly talking about their joint participation.

Results

Summary of the Papers

Study 1 and 2 (Paper I) aimed to investigate antecedents and need satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs of world-class athletes (n = 6) and coaches in relation to each other (n = 4). The two studies were conducted with the use of semi-structured interviews. In study 1, it was being seen as a whole person and being acknowledged in the planning process, and the execution of training that arose as antecedents of autonomy. Help to improve skills and feeling supported as an athlete was essential for need satisfaction of competence and relatedness. Possible antecedents of need thwarting were also brought to light. For the coaches in study 2, feedback on the quality of their work emerged as an antecedent of need satisfaction of competence. The need to know their athletes' life situation and their thoughts and feelings in various competitive situations arose as antecedents of the coaches' need satisfaction of relatedness. The results did not disclose any antecedents of need fulfilment of autonomy amongst the coaches. However, it was unveiled, that athletes clearly have the potential to thwart coaches' needs.

Study 3 (Paper II) aimed to explore the meaning of the coach-athlete relationship for two Norwegian male super-elite athletes. Using semi-structured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) the results informed four emergent themes that portrayed underlying dynamics that shaped their perception of what frames an effective coach-athlete relationship; 1) Extreme independence, 2) Coaching without skills? 3) The coach as a butler and 4) Expectations – make it or break it. These underlying dynamics are further discussed using the theoretical frameworks of coping strategies and power, with the necessity for control as an essential common feature.

Study 4 (Paper III) aimed to explore the interpersonal knowledge of two Serial Winning Coaches (SWC's) in world-class sport, and how they used this expertise to build a collaborative partnership with their athletes. With the use of semi-structured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), we found four super-ordinate themes to present the results; 1) The coach's role and interpersonal relations in the demanding world of elite-sport, 2) The importance of safety and the coach's role in providing it, 3) Safety and trust as prerequisites for high performance, and 4) Flexible communication - the driving force in the relationship. Overall, the analysis revealed that the basic premise for the coaches' interactions with the athletes was a recognition that the athletes' interpretation of a situation could be different than theirs. Having a high-quality relationship was, in many ways, a buffer for disruptions and unnecessary risks in a context that is marked by uncertainty. The super-ordinate themes are further discussed within the theoretical frameworks of psychological safety and trust, with the argument that these concepts represent relevant perspectives in the discussion of the significance of coaches' interpersonal knowledge in world-class sport.

Study 5 (Paper IV) aimed to explore in detail the use of communication, its meaning, and purpose in two coach-athlete dyads performing at the world-class level. With the application of semi-structured interviews and multiperspectival Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the results informed four emergent superordinate themes; 1) Making sure life does not get in the way of performance, 2) Communication in training - preparation for the competition, 3) Competition - communication when the adrenaline is pumping, and 4) When the going gets (really) tough. Overall, the analysis revealed mattering perspectives for describing the communication process and its significance for relationship quality and performances at the world-class level. The superordinate themes are further discussed with the use of the concept of empathic accuracy and research relating to communication with the argument that the communication process within the dyad increased

empathic accuracy, which again improved the quality of the subsequent communication

process.

Discussion

Research Question 1A and 1B

Study 1: How do highly elite athletes experience need satisfaction within their collaboration with their coach?

Study 2: How do elite coaches perceive their athletes to influence them, and what do they recognize as supportive athlete behaviour?

Until studies 1 and 2 (paper I) were conducted, research within SDT was mainly related to the coach-athlete relationship based on coaches 'need supporting behaviour and the athletes' need satisfaction (Adie et al., 2008; Gillet et al., 2010). In other words, there was hardly any research that had looked at how athletes contributed to or affected need satisfaction among coaches. Hence, an essential purpose of the studies in paper I was to illuminate the mutual need support between world-class athletes and coaches, and thus how they contribute to each other's need satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs. The studies also revealed that coaches and athletes at this level could thwart each other's needs, which also were interesting findings. In paper I, we claim that *"an important area for dyadic studies on the coach-athlete relationship within SDT would be to examine how the process of need satisfaction takes place within this relationship and its influence on relationship quality"*. We also argued that *"more research is needed to investigate the process of low need satisfaction and/or need thwarting within coach-athlete relationships and how this affects both athletes and coaches"*. The inclusion of the sixth mini-theory, Relationship Motivation Theory (RMT) (Standage & Emm, 2014; Standage & Ryan, 2020) within the SDT framework, now provides the foundation to investigate this area further.

According to Standage and Ryan (2020), sport and exercise settings provide many opportunities to establish and sustain meaningful and close relations. Indeed, these contexts

provide numerous and complex reciprocal and non-reciprocal relationships that differ in terms of power, degree of mutuality, structure, as well as the developmental stage of individuals within and across contexts, for instance, relationships among peers and coaches and athletes. Further, they encourage scientists to engage with RMT as a medium of better comprehending relational dynamics in, for instance, the coach-athlete relationship. However, when explaining the RMT, Ryan and Deci (2017) claim that the focus of RMT is close adult-to-adult relationships such as friendships and romantic partnerships as the fundamental need for relatedness and its interplay with other basic needs is particularly evident in these kinds of close personal relationships. They continue to argue that across and within both temporary and enduring relationships, relatedness is not just a role of contact or positive affect, but instead intertwined with factors such as perceived autonomous and genuine caring between oneself and another. It is relationships in which the other's engagement is recognised as unconditional and authentic that are the most satisfying. Even though there are extrinsic gains in having close relationships, the real satisfaction of relatedness will come from both persons being motivated by intrinsic, genuine care for each other (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Suppose one interprets others to seek friendship of extrinsic reasons, such as status, material gain or access to resources. In that case, SDT suggests that you will feel less rather than more relatedness to those others. They also refer to the coach-athlete relationship as a different type of interpersonal relationship because they are characterised in part by authority differences, concerns with competence and performance, and other issues that influences their unique dynamics.

Although scholars within SDT (e.g. Standage & Emm, 2014; Standage & Ryan, 2020) encourage researchers to investigate the relational dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship with the use of RMT, based on the fundamental principles of RMT I do think it is valid to question if RMT is the best suitable theoretical framework for this purpose. I believe it is

relevant to argue that although some of the characteristics of coach-athlete relationships are similar to those found in romantic relationships or friendships, the interpersonal settings are specific, affecting the relationship members' behaviour and social interplays in different ways (Acitelli, Duck, & West, 2000).

At the highest level in sport, the coach-athlete relationship is better portrayed as a collaborative rather than a hierarchical relationship with the coach having the most power (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). The relationship between the coach and athlete is also often typified by being task-oriented, where the aim is to create situations that both parties consider meaningful and beneficial, and where both parties support each other in achieving the goals that are relevant to their relationship (Jowett, 2017). A relationship where the coach and the athlete are meaningfully connected is more likely to stimulate, inspire, satisfy, and support the goal of improving their sporting experience, as well as their overall well-being (Davis, Jowett, & Tafvelin, 2019). Coaches and athletes at the world-class level can undoubtedly have a close, meaningful relationship where both partners care for one another. Still, the ultimate purpose of the relationship is performance and the achievement of results.

Perhaps the purpose of the relationship in the form of achieving results is especially apparent in the antecedents for need satisfaction of relatedness. Still, in my opinion, it is apparent an all the emergent antecedents. Feeling supported as an athlete emerged as an essential antecedent for need satisfaction of relatedness for the athletes, while for the coaches, they needed to know their athletes' life situation, and how they would think and feel in various competition scenarios as it provided them with a sense of security. While these antecedents likely represent valuable relational conditions within the coach-athlete relationship, they are still linked to the external reason for their relationship. Being supported as an athlete, being informed about their athletes' life situation, and insight into the athletes'

way of reacting in different competition scenarios are inevitably relational support considered important because it will help the athletes and coaches to develop and perform.

A coach-athlete relationship model that has gathered strength over the last two decades is the 3+1C model (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). This model captures the coach and the athlete's interdependent feelings of closeness (i.e. an emotional connection displayed in trust, like, and respect), thoughts of commitment (i.e. a motivation to sustain a close relationship over time) and complementarity (i.e. behaviours showed in interplays that are responsive, comfortable, and pleasant) (Davis et al., 2019). To capture the complexity and also the quality of the relationship one needs to measure the degree of interdependence of the 3Cs (Jowett & Felton, 2014), which is the +1C in the model – co-orientation. The 3+1C model underlines the quality of the relationship or the degree to which members are interdependent and postulates that the quality of the relationship can function in ways that encourage or discourage athletes and coaches from expressing their needs and satisfy their goals (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016).

Research on the coach-athlete relationship has provided evidence that relationship quality associates with important performance-related and well-being outcomes including sport and relationship satisfaction (Davis & Jowett, 2014; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009), motivation (Adie & Jowett, 2010; Felton & Jowett, 2013), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004), well-being indicators (Felton & Jowett, 2013), and physical and cognitive performance (Davis, Appleby, Davis, Wetherell, & Gustafsson, 2018). Recent research has also highlighted negative outcomes associated with poor quality coach-athlete relationships including interpersonal conflict (Wachsmuth, Jowett, & Harwood, 2018). In other words, the 3+1C model is specifically developed to measure relationship quality in the coach-athlete relationship, recognising its inherent relational characteristics and purposes. Research using this model has also provided extensive information about the significance of relationship

quality in this relationship. Thus, I believe that future research aiming to enhance our understanding of relationship quality in the coach-athlete relationship should recognise the momentum of the 3+1C model and research linked to this model.

While the quality of the coach-athlete relationship is associated with both positive and negative outcomes, it is essential to understand the mechanisms by which the relationship quality links with these outcomes (Davis et al., 2019). Further, the coach-athlete relationship quality can affect and be affected by situational factors presented to coaches and athletes at any given moment. For instance, it is suggested that situational factors such as performance level, competition versus practice, competition outcomes, previous success and failure record, organizational structure, and cultural factors are likely to influence both coaches actual behaviours and athletes' perceptions and evaluative reactions of their coaches' behaviour. This will, in turn, influences the athlete's performance, satisfaction, and well-being (Chelladurai, 2007).

The importance of gaining more insight into the mechanisms by which relationship quality is associated with relevant outcomes, and the influence of situational factors on the coach-athlete relationship through communicative acts of interaction brings us further to the second aim and research question of this doctoral thesis;

Research Question 2

Explore underlying dynamics that influences athletes' perception of what constitute an effective coach-athlete relationship

Important situational factors which likely influenced the results in study 3 (paper II) are performance level, previous success level, and perhaps also cultural factors in terms of the egalitarian culture in Norway with the value of low power distance. The characteristics of super-elite athletes as more selfish and ruthless in their quest for success, their elevated need for success, and them placing the relative importance of sport over interpersonal relationships

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(Güllich et al., 2019; Hardy et al., 2017) was factors that seemed to come into play in these athletes' perspectives of what constitute an effective coach-athlete relationship.

The athletes' perspectives in study 3 do not correspond to the characteristics of relationship quality based on the 3 + 1C model and the extensive research related to it, which means that one should exercise caution when assessing the validity of these perspectives for other coach-athlete relationships. Nevertheless, this study contributes useful knowledge about what may be the possible relational consequences of athletes' superior performance over time. Although one cannot generalize from this study, for those working with athletes and coaches in this performance context, it is worth noting that an athlete's results over time can affect the relational dynamics within the coach-athlete relationship. One does not have to agree with, desire or encourage the relational perspective that is presented, nor their description of the coaching role and what characterizes an effective coach-athlete relationship in their eyes. Nevertheless, it is essential to be aware of the potentially great power extreme performance can give athletes, and that it can be handled in different ways, also within the coach-athlete relationship.

More in line with previous research on relationship quality and the characteristics of the coach-athlete relationship at the highest level in sport as a collaborative partnership, the aim in study 4 (paper III) was research question 3;

Research Question 3

Explore the interpersonal knowledge of Serial Winning Coaches (SWC) and how they used their expertise in this field to build a collaborative partnership with their athletes

In a study where the purpose was to gain insight into the actual practices and developmental pathways of serial winning coaches (SWC), the coaches highlighted careful management as vital to ensure everyone could perform to their potential (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). A critical factor in their management was to encourage belief in and around the organisation and in the team. For the SWC this meant to cultivate a belief in them and their ability to form a

positive bond with the athletes and the team by having open and honest communication, being

empathic and sincere and providing a holistic approach to athlete development. Furthermore,

the SWC promoted the athletes' belief in themselves by investing time in developing their

confidence in their ability, and to motivate them to proceed to strive to improve and win.

According to Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016), this is not about kindness or positive

reinforcement alone, but much more in finding an optimal balance between challenge and

support that stimulates athletes' growth. Means to accomplish this balance was by an open

display of trust in the athlete's talent, shared decision making, fostering increased levels of

self-reliance and awareness and leadership skills, and focusing more on process than results.

The SWC also emphasised fostering a common belief in the programme and their joint ability

to achieve its goals. The required conditions to provide this common belief was role

demarcation, transparent and open communication, and performance management (Lara-

Bercial & Mallett, 2016). To create these conditions, the SWC reported on the need of being

emotionally sensitive toward their athletes and having an enhanced self-awareness. Emotional

sensitivity and self-awareness again served as prerequisites of their ability to individually

adapt their behaviour rather than a standardised behaviour to relationship building and

conflict management.

When the athletes in this study were asked to elaborate on what they felt was unique

about their SWC compared to coaches at lower levels they placed great importance on the

inter- and intrapersonal skills of the coaches, like empathy, open-mindedness, persuasiveness,

and self-awareness (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Regarding persuasiveness, they

particularly highlighted the SWCs' use of persuasiveness to build a collaborative environment

that was dialogue-based and being supportive of athletes speaking out, taking the initiative

and displaying creativity.

Although study 4 (paper III) was conducted on a smaller sample and with a narrower focus than the study by Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016), there are still similarities between what characterises necessary environmental and relational premises for performance. Nevertheless, since the main focus of Study 4 was to explore the interpersonal knowledge of SWC and how they used this expertise to build a collaborative partnership with their athletes, its main contribution to the field to provide an insight into how coaches can work and what they can do in practice to develop their interpersonal knowledge and skills to create the environment and relational interplay optimal for performance.

As previously mentioned, psychological safety is a relatively new concept in sports research. Nevertheless, there are some intriguing findings on the role of psychological safety in creating team resilience, satisfaction with performance and improved health (Fransen et al., 2020). These results make it interesting to conduct further research with the use of this concept in elite sports. One might also argue that there is some similarity between the key factor of the common belief emphasised by the SWC (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016) and the identity leadership explained in Fransen et al. (2020). At the core of identity leadership is the characteristics of creating a "we" and "us" compared to "me" and "I", which may substantiate the argument that psychological safety can provide a robust theoretical framework to elaborate on how coaches in elite sports can create the environment and collaborative partnership they emphasise as vital to improve and win. Still, more research is needed to substantiate this argument.

Research Question 4

Investigate in detail the use of communication, its meaning and purpose in coach-athlete dyads

Successful coaches have long known that the time and energy invested in building quality relationship with their athletes pay huge returns (Gilbert, 2017). Still, it is also argued that building and sustaining quality coach-athlete relationship is one of the most unstable and

complicated aspect of coaching. Part of the reason that coach-athlete relationships present so many challenges is that requires the coaches to possess a high level of empathic accuracy of their athletes (Gilbert, 2017). Gilbert (2017) further argue that empathic accuracy is similar to emotional intelligence, and that successful coaches have high emotional intelligence because they are skilled at reading people and then using those intuitions and observations to make effective decisions. To acquire empathic accuracy and build and sustain quality coach-athlete relationship, the most widely recommended and most effective coaching strategy is communication (Gilbert, 2017). The SWC also confirmed that high levels of emotional intelligence were critical to successful management of elite athletes and programs (Chan & Mallett, 2011), and both the SWC and their athletes regarded efficient communication as a key skill to succeed (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016).

Researchers have emphasised the importance of interpersonal communication as a key factor in our understanding of the mechanisms that affects and is affected by the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). It also appears that relationship quality and communication mutually influences one another and that this reciprocal relationship could be a vital process for the achievement of important outcomes related to performance and well-being (Davis et al., 2019). However, the research in this field is limited. Hence, the purpose of study 5 (paper IV) and also its contribution to the field is a detailed account of the communication within two coach-athlete dyads. In line with the suggestion that future research, in addition to the content, also should pay attention to examining how one communicates and the influence of emotions on the communication process within the coach-athlete relationship (Davis et al., 2019), study 5 provides a nuanced and complex picture of the communication process in two coach-athlete dyads. The study illuminates the importance of the coach ability to flexibly apply different communication strategies to meet the individual athlete-in-situation. His flexible adaptation to the athlete-in-situation applies to both the

content, the change of tone of his voice, as well as his use of body language. Changing the

tone of his voice was a strategy to increase the effectiveness of his communication, and

likeliness of there being a correspondence between his intention with the message, and the

athlete's reception and interpretation of the same message. The study also clearly shows how

their daily training was explicitly used to optimize the quality of their communication process

to make it a performance-enhancing factor rather than a disruption in the emotionally intense

competitive situation. These findings also correspond with the findings of Lara-Bercial and

Mallett (2016) that SWC has an increased capability to be flexible and adjust to the needs of

their athletes, the situation and the context. According to their athletes, SWC display a

capacity to be thinking in innovative ways and to resolve the challenges presented to them

(Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016).

In addition to providing detailed insight into the communication processes and the

importance of the coach's ability to flexibly adapt his use of different communication

strategies, communication between the coach and the athlete also appears to be a central

component for building empathic accuracy. In their studies on the role of communication

strategies that athletes use to develop their coach-athlete relationships (Davis et al., 2019),

their findings provide evidence to highlight the possible cyclical relationship between

communication and relationship quality over time. In our study, we find a similar interplay

between communication and empathic accuracy. It seems that the communication process in

training where the coach and the athlete get to know each other and where the coach keeps

updated on the athlete's life events provides a foundation for empathic accuracy. The

established empathic accuracy contributes to raising the quality of their further

communication, which in turn contributes to heightened empathic accuracy. This process is,

according to the participants, essential for both performance and the quality of the

relationship. A possible image of the reciprocation between communication and empathic accuracy that seems to unfold over time in our study can be an upward spiral. Considering the reciprocal relationship between communication and relationship quality argued in Davis et al. (2019), and the reciprocal relationship between communication and empathic accuracy argued in our study, an interesting area for future research could be to investigate the role and the process of communication, empathic accuracy, and relationship quality and its implications for essential outcomes related to performance and well-being.

Limitations

While the findings in this doctoral thesis contribute with interesting and important perspectives in the quest to improve our understanding of relationship dynamics and mechanisms operating in and influencing the coach-athlete relationship at the world-class level, there are also limitations to consider.

In line with the overall purpose of qualitative inquiries, a hermeneutic or an IPA approach is proper when a comprehensive, in-depth view of a phenomenon is necessitated to explore an intricate process and to clarify the multifaceted nature of human experience, in this case, the coach-athlete relationship at the world-class level (Tuffour, 2017). Conducting a hermeneutic or an IPA study is a dynamic process with the active role of the researcher who influences the extent to which they get access to the participant's experience and how, through interpretative activity, they make sense of the participant's personal world (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). It is necessary to bear in mind that hermeneutics and IPA is a subjective research approach, so different analysts working with the same transcript may come up with diverse interpretations (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Hence, possible limitations of the studies in this doctoral thesis are to the degree to which I and we have been able to properly explore, comprehend, and communicate the encounters and perspectives contributed by the participants (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

Because of its idiographic commitment, IPA studies often have a small number of participants. Small sample sizes are regarded to be a value in itself as it presents an opportunity to get insight into the important meaning of each case (Smith, 2004). However, idiographic studies with so few respondents cannot claim to offer an absolute answer as to what are the best relationship dynamics or conditions for improving relationship quality and performances in coach-athlete relationships at a world-class level. Other studies will probably provide information on additional factors that will contribute further insights and enhance our understanding of the coach-athlete relationship.

The aim of IPA (or hermeneutics) is not to generate a theory or to generalise to the whole population (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Nevertheless, through the steady growth of similar studies, generalisation may be achievable over time. The studies in this doctoral thesis are limited to coaches and athletes at the world-class, and the findings cannot automatically be generalised to other coach-athlete relationships, even at a similar level. Still, I believe that these studies contribute with perspectives and insights that may also be relevant to others who are part of the context of world-class sport. Not only were there interesting similarities between the findings in previous studies of super-elite athletes (Hardy et al., 2017), SWC (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016) and the conclusions of our studies. Our studies also provided in-depth and detailed insight into aspects considered essential by the super-elite athlete and SWC in the studies as mentioned above. Thus, it makes sense to argue that the findings presented in our studies might prove relevant for other coach-athlete relationship within the sphere of world-class sport. Still, one should be open to the fact that there may be other equally suitable theoretical frameworks that could help explain or highlight the findings revealed in these studies.

Conclusion

Paper I: The findings of study 1 and 2 have given us more insight into the antecedents of need satisfaction and need thwarting of both elite athletes and coaches. These findings have thus provided us with a more in-depth knowledge of the mutuality of need support within the coach-athlete relationship at the elite level.

Paper II: The findings of study 3 offer increased insight into the importance of underlying psychological mechanisms for athletes' perception of what forms an efficient relationship with their coach. Research related to coping strategies and power offered sound theoretical explanatory frameworks for these athletes' stories.

Paper III: The findings of study 4 have provided us with more insight into valuable environmental and relational conditions in world-class sport, seen from the perspective of two seral winning coaches. The study also elaborates on how to create this kind of environment. The concept of psychological safety and research related to this concept provided a sound theoretical framework for understanding these coaches' stories. Clarifying the distinctions between the term psychological safety and trust (Edmondson, 2019) also helped to put essential details in the coaches' stories in a theoretical perspective.

Paper IV: The findings of study 5 provide a valuable perspective on the communication process and its significance in two coach-athlete dyads that have consistently produced world-class performances. The study also contributes detailed insight into the value of communication between the coach and athlete toward improving relationship quality. The concept of empathic accuracy and research relating to communication provided sound theoretical frameworks in explaining the personal interplay within the two dyads.

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Paper I-IV

Paper I

Frøyen, A. F., Pensgaard, A. M. (2014). Antecedents of need fulfilment among elite athletes and coaches. A qualitative approach. *International Journal of Applied Sports Sciences,* 26(1), 26-41.

Antecedents of need fulfillment among elite athletes and coaches: A qualitative approach

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Abstract

The main objective of study 1 and 2 was to provide, within the framework of basic psychological need theory (BPNT), a mini-theory in self-determination theory (SDT), more in-depth understanding of the needs which athletes and coaches have in relation to each other. In particular, we wanted to investigate antecedents of the three basic psychological needs of athletes and coaches who compete at the elite level in sport. The two studies were conducted with the use of semi-structured interviews. Six former Norwegian world-class athletes participated in study 1 and four coaches with extensive experience within elite sport participated in study 2. In study 1, being seen as a whole person and being recognized in the planning process and the execution of athletes' training emerged as antecedents of autonomy. Help to improve skills and feeling supported as an athlete emerged as important for need satisfaction of competence and relatedness. Potential antecedents of need thwarting were also illuminated. In study 2, feedback on the quality of the coaches' work emerged as an antecedents of need satisfaction of competence. The need to know their athletes' life situation and how they would think and feel in different competitive situations emerged as antecedents of the coaches' need satisfaction of relatedness as it provided them with a sense of security. The results did not reveal any antecedents of need fulfillment of autonomy among the coaches. It was, however, revealed that athletes have the potential to thwart coaches' needs. 241 words

Key words: Self-Determination Theory, Basic Psychological Needs, Elite Sport, Coaches, Athletes

Introduction

Elite sport is a context wherein its participants are very much concerned with performance development in striving for success. There is a constant focus on good results, and thus it is an environment that can be very competitive and potentially stressful. Elite athletes and coaches also often spend more than 150 days

together in any one year (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002), and it is important that this relationship is effective as the quality of the coach-athlete relationship is highly relevant for the development of performance, satisfaction (Jowett & Meek, 2000) and motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

According to the theoretical framework of the self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), individuals have an innate motivation to take part in meaningful activities, develop and exercise skills, and search for a sense of belonging to other people and

social groups. Basic psychological need theory (BPNT; Ryan & Deci, 2002), one of the mini-theories within SDT, pays specific attention to the concept of innate psychological needs; the need for autonomy, the need for competence and the need for relatedness, and their direct influence on the development of integrity, psychological growth and health (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). The need for autonomy is satisfied when one feels that one is the origin of one's own actions, as one act in accordance with one's own interests and integrated values (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Behavior influenced by external sources can also be perceived as autonomous if it is experienced to coincide with one's initiative and values and consequently express part of oneself (Ryan & Deci, 2002).The need for competence is satisfied when one experiences mastery, and at the same time has the possibility to develop further within one's environment/social context. The need for competence makes people seek challenges that are optimal according to their capacities, which in turn contributes to ongoing effort to maintain and improve relevant skills through the activity. The need for relatedness is satisfied when one feels connected to others and that one cares for them and vice versa (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2002). The feeling of belonging to other people and one's environment is important as it contributes to the experience of acceptance by one's fellows, companions and peers.

Research using the theoretical framework of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) to study relationship functioning and need satisfaction within sport has until now focused primarily on how coaches influence need satisfaction of the basic psychological needs, motivation and well-being among athletes (Adie et al., 2008; Gillett et al., 2010). In other words, the focus has thus far not been directed at how athletes contribute to need satisfaction among coaches. With these contextual characteristics in mind and the fact that elite athletes perceive the quality of the coach-athlete relationship to play a pivotal role in their development (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003), it makes it interesting to gain more in-depth knowledge about their experiences in relation to each other.

According to BPNT, need satisfaction of the basic psychological needs is directly linked to well-being, whereas hindrance of the needs will directly lead to thwarting of a healthy development of the self and its functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2002). New research argues, however, that it is not necessarily correct to assume that low need satisfaction indicates that there is high need thwarting (Bartholomew et al., 2011).The reason for this is that need thwarting involves an active opposition to need satisfaction, whereas low need satisfaction demands that needs are not sufficiently satisfied. Consequently, Bartholomew et al. (2011) argue that it is more accurate to measure the degree of need thwarting to predict instances of need thwarting rather than measure need satisfaction. By representing two different constructs, need thwarting and need satisfaction could also be present in the same context. When we investigate the perceived needs of athletes and coaches in relation to each other and how they found their counterpart influenced them during their career, it provides us with an opportunity to obtain further insight into how the mechanisms of both need satisfaction and need thwarting may operate within the context of elite sport.

There is now an increased recognition of the fact that other people do play a very important role when it comes to the effect on an individual's well-being through need satisfaction of the basic psychological needs (Patrick et al., 2007). According to La Guardia and Patrick (2008) a relationship partner will be autonomy-supportive when he or she tries to understand the other's perspective, interests and preferences. Provision of clear, reasonable expectations and structures allows the need for competence to be supported. Relatedness support is provided by involvement and interest in the other person, and by showing that the other is important. If the relationship partner, however, is excessively controlling, too challenging or dismissive, the needs will not be met and optimal functioning will

be impaired (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Basic psychological needs - their functional meaning in a social context

An important aspect of basic psychological needs is that they are said to be universal, which means that they apply to all humans across gender, age and culture. How the needs are satisfied might vary, however, because it is not the environment itself that means something, but rather the functional meaning it has for the need satisfaction of an individual (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Thus, in an environment where a person experiences a sense of competence, relatedness and autonomy, his/her motivation regarding the given activity will be optimal. If one looks at this in the context of sport, both coaches and athletes must experience need fulfilment in order to experience optimal functioning. Considering that, at the elite level, both coaches and athletes spend a considerable amount of the year together (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002), many probably spend more time with each other than each of them does with family and friends in the course of a year. This makes it likely that the two parties have the opportunity to influence each other's need satisfaction. Research has already revealed that different forms of coach behavior indeed predict athletes' need satisfaction (Reinboth & Duda, 2006; Reinboth et al., 2004), but as far as we know it has not previously been published any studies that focus on how the coaches perceive that the athletes' behavior may affect *their* need satisfaction. Thus, it is important to investigate the means through which the three needs are satisfied and recognized as the antecedents of need satisfaction, for both athletes and coaches. Further, this will also help us to gain insight into how athletes and coaches perceive their relationship partner to influence their basic need satisfaction within the elite sport context. In line with this argument, the questions we want to address are: what are important considerations for athletes in the elite sport context in terms of need satisfaction? how can coaches in this context contribute to their athletes' need fulfillment? what are important considerations for coaches in the elite sport context in terms of need satisfaction? how can athletes in this context contribute to their coaches' need fulfillment?

Because even minor differences in the environment can affect the performance and perception of ability for athletes at the world-class level (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002) a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate in order to try and capture these small nuances. According to Vergeer (2000) a qualitative approach can provide a sharp focus on data and thus on our understanding when we investigate issues related to the functioning of relationships in sport. We conducted two separate studies in order to provide insight into these questions.

Study 1

In the first study, we wanted to expand on Reinboth and Duda´s (2006) study where the findings revealed that athletes' perception of a coach-created task involving climate positively predicted their need satisfaction of autonomy, competence and relatedness and that need satisfaction of autonomy and coach relatedness were positive significant predictors of an increase in subjective vitality. Thus, the aim of the first study was to provide deeper insight into highly elite athletes' experiences of need satisfaction within their collaboration with their coach. It is reasonable to assume that elite athletes' perceptions may differ from those of lower-level athletes owing to the fact that they spend a considerable amount of time "on the road" with their team and coach. A more comprehensive understanding of this rather atypical work environment and how it influence athletes is important if we want to develop this relationship further.

Method

Participants

The participants were selected on the basis of their accomplishments in elite sport over time and retirement from their athletic career at the time of interview. The criterion for inclusion of athletes was that they should have a minimum of three medals from international championships.[1]

The conditions under which elite athletes develop change constantly and it was therefore decided to include athletes who had ended their careers between 2000 and 2010. The criterion that the athletes should have retired from their career was set because it was believed that they would be able to provide an overall picture and be better able to see connections and consequences of different incidents in their life and career than athletes at the peak or in the middle of their career.

Six athletes participated in the study, four female athletes and two male athletes. Five of the athletes participated in individual sports, both summer and winter sports, and one of the female athletes part- icipated in a team sport. These athletes had won seventeen medals in the Olympic Games, eight of which were gold medals. They also attained forty-eight medals from the World Championship, twenty-three of which were gold medals and eight medals from the European Championship, four of which were gold medals. In the interest of anonymity the descriptions of the athletes are brief.

Procedure

An invitation to take part in the study, an information letter and an informed consent form were sent by post or by e-mail to the participants. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time and that the study had received ethical approval from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). Eight athletes were invited to participate, but two of them did not respond.

Interview guide

Because the purpose of this study was to gain a more in-depth understanding of need satisfaction and the functional meaning of needs within the framework of BPNT, this framework was also used as part of the basis for preparation of the interview guide.[2]

It was emphasized, however, that the specific questions were open-ended to enable the participants to talk about their experiences and the knowledge gained throughout their athletic career. Questions included: "In what way did your coach take into consideration that, even though you were an elite athlete, you might have a need to participate in other arenas in life outside sport?" "How involved were you in the planning process and evaluation of your training?" "What do you think is the most important part of a coach's job?" "How did you respond to negative feedback versus positive feedback from your coach?" "What, in your opinion, is the coach's role in building athletes' confidence?" "What role did having a sense of security have for you as an elite athlete?" "Have you ever experienced any negative incidents or episodes during your athletic career?" and "Is there anything you wish in retrospect that people surrounding you when you were an elite athlete had not done?" The conducted interviews were part of a larger study and thus the overall interview guide covered these main topics: career development, significant others, the meaning of the coach-athlete relationship, preparation and participation in major championships, stress and coping strategies and motivational climate. In study 1 is the primary focus is on needs which athletes had in relation to their coaches and how they perceived their coaches influenced them. The interview guide was semi-structured with the main

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1) European Championships, World Cups and/ or Olympic Games

2) The interview guide is available by request from the first author

themes described above forming the basis for the interview conversation. The direction of the conversation was influenced by the participants, however. Follow-up questions were also asked to obtain more detailed information.

Interview procedure

The time and place for the interviews were arranged with each participant. Four of the interviews were conducted at the Olympic Training Center in Oslo. One of the interviews was conducted at the participant's current workplace and one interview was conducted at the participant's home. Each participant was interviewed once. The interviews lasted from one hour and fifty minutes to two hours and forty-five minutes. Reasons for the variation in the length of the interviews may be that some of the respondents had experienced more during their career and/or had reflected more on their experiences or were more willing to share their experiences with the interviewer (first author). All of the interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim by the first author. The interview texts were then sent back to the participants for review. They were all asked to confirm that the written interview text was in agreement with what they had intended to communicate. They were also invited to make further specifications or rephrase the wording if they felt that what they had wanted to communicate was not reflected in the written text.

Data analysis

The analysis of the interviews was carried out within the hermeneutical tradition. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation and deals with how we read and understand text (Thiselton, 2009). Two central concepts within this tradition are preliminary understanding and the hermeneutical circle (Palmer, 1969). The preliminary understanding or starting-point of this study was an interest in the importance of need satisfaction within the coach-athlete relationships in elite sport

that emerged through previous work also grounded in self-determination theory (Frøyen & Pensgaard, 2008). A significant aspect of the hermeneutical circle is to be aware of and acknowledge that one always looks at events or situations in the light of previous experiences (Smith, 2007). When the first author started conducting the interviews, the attention previously directed toward the recognition and comprehension of preliminary understandings was moved toward the participants. The task was now to facilitate the participants' opportunity to talk about their experiences in elite sport (Smith, 2007).

The further process of analysis began when we received the participants' responses to the written interview texts. An important first step was to identify needs in relation to their coaches, i.e. the higher-order themes. These higher-order themes represented the antecedents of need satisfaction of basic psychological needs. On the basis of the content, the various antecedents were further encoded with reference to the basic need to which they were assumed to contribute.

The Maxqda 10 was used as an analytic tool in the coding process. As the hermeneutical circle operates on several different levels, it was emphasized that the interpretation of each statement gave meaning within the whole interview text, and that the interview texts gave meaning to each statement, thereby relating the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts (Smith, 2007). It was also emphasized that the understanding of each of the higher-order themes gave meaning to the existing theory, and that the existing theory gave meaning to each higher-order theme, representing a whole and parts at a different level. Because attainment of understanding is often a process, the interpretations were discussed by the authors over time. When we experienced differences in our understanding or interpretations the interviews were reread and discussed to clarify the conditions that were involved in our process of understanding (Madison, 1991). As the hermeneutical approach advocates that truth in interpretations is generated through conversation and dialogue (Gallagher, 1992; Smith, 1997) this process was perceived as an

important criterion in terms of establishing confidence in our data interpretation process (Sparkes & Smith, 2009).

Results

The participants are described by a number (e.g., athlete 1), and F for female or M for male (e.g., athlete1 [F]).

The need to be in control of their lives and their training

Although the athletes themselves had chosen sport participation as their primary focus, it was still important for them that their coaches took into account that they also had a need to be involved in other areas of life outside sport; athlete 6 [F]:

Obviously I went to practice because I thought it was fun, but if I was tired of it one day I could just give him [coach] a call to say that I wanted to stay at home or go to the movies with some friends or something.

Within the training context, however, the picture differed slightly. Athlete 5[F] wanted her coach to take complete control of the development of training plans;

For me it was important to have a coach that just told me what I had to do. I trusted that my coach had faith in his own expertise and that made me confident and enabled me to fully focus on what I had to during practice, because it was what I did during practice that was important. In contrast to athlete 5[F], the other athletes needed their coaches to involve them in the planning process of their training and also in its evaluation. Athlete 1[F] was however the only athlete who felt that she was not adequately involved. She found her coaches to be very single-minded in terms of what one had to do to be successful, and they were not interested in her views and experiences with regard to practice;

There were not many who asked how I found the training. You feel and sense quite a lot during training,

you know. You know your own body after doing sport for more than twenty years. You get to be very aware of your body and how you react to different kinds of training.

The need to gain confidence and feel competent

The training situation was where the athletes had the opportunity to practice skills they needed to improve. The coach's task was to challenge the athletes and help them break through their performance barriers and thus contribute to their athletes' experience of self-confidence at a higher level of performance.

Athlete 6[F]: *As a player you might have barriers when it comes to playing against certain players. But if you are going to get better you have to work at it step by step. I think being able to talk about it, making situations seem a bit less dangerous, then you feel a bit stronger, you get a little more faith in your own skills, but you might need to hear it from the coach that you are good at this.*

Athlete 1[F] and 2[F] highlighted the importance of a positive perspective and a positive approach in training for optimal development. For athlete 1[F] one of the most important things was to have a positive approach to what she did in training. The coach's feedback had to be focused on what she should do, not on what she should not do. She felt that she really looked for the good messages that made it possible for her body to perform the required movement. Thus, she was very much aware of how she and the coach communicated and the feedback she received had to be very clear. For athlete 2[F], help with changing her focus from what she was doing wrong to what she did well was of great value; *Of course, you noted when you did something wrong. But what we were to recognize and repeat and reinforce were the things we did well. That was really a mind-opening experience for me.*

The need to feel supported

Having confidence in their own skills and their ability to further develop provided all the athletes with

a sense of security that they perceived to be essential for them. An important factor in creating this feeling of security was that the coaches showed that they had faith in them and believed in them as athletes and their ability to perform at the highest level in sport.

Athlete 6[F]: *If you do not have a platform of security it is difficult to break performance barriers again and again. The feeling of security needs to be there for you to have the courage to challenge yourself on other things.*

Athlete 2[F] also said that the need to receive support from coaches so she felt feel secure and relaxed in championships grew as she continually performed at the highest level.

When you have achieved as much as I have it was expected that I should perform every time. Then you need some support from people whom you trust and whom you can actually tell if you are feeling a bit insecure or nervous. In many ways I needed more support in the last years of my career than I did in my younger years when I was more courageous in a sense. The increased pressure made me need the coaches in a different way to find the necessary sense of security.

Athlete 4[M] also drew attention to some of the things athlete 2[F] mentioned by emphasizing that although a sense of security is important athletes still need to be challenged to develop. Nevertheless, he highlighted that in his last years as an elite athlete it was the coaches' and support staff's faith in him that was the most important, as he felt that he had a high level of expertise.

Two of the athletes found their sense of security in relation to their coaches vanished, as they felt thwarted and rejected by their coaches. Both of them found this to be their most negative experience throughout their career. Athlete 5[F] described her experience more precisely: *I thought it was really tough, tragic really. It was the worst thing I have ever experienced because there were so many things that were not good between us and I simply did not feel welcome.*

Athlete 1[F] had the opportunity to terminate the relationship with her coach and so she did. Athlete 5[F] on the other hand had to maintain her relationship as she was at the mercy of that coach if she wanted to be part of the national team. In the end, however, her feeling of insecurity became such a burden that she decided to end her career despite the fact that she was still performing at world-class level.

Discussion

The overall findings in the athlete section indicated that coaches can play a pivotal role when it comes to providing antecedents of athletes' need satisfaction and/or need thwarting, which is consonant with the findings of Bartholomew et al. (2011), Adie et al. (2008), Amorose and Anderson-Butcher (2007) and Gillet et al. (2010). The findings also revealed interesting insights into the significance of all the needs being satisfied within one context and also suggested the importance of balance in need satisfaction between contexts (Milyavskaya et al., 2009).

Sufficient and insufficient fulfillment of the need for autonomy

Given the athletes' response it is evident that they had a general autonomous orientation toward their sport participation. At the same time they also had coaches who understood that even though they were highly committed elite athletes they also had a need to be involved in arenas outside sport. It is therefore fair to assume that the athletes would still maintain their feeling of autonomy if they sometimes had to limit their participation in these other arenas. This kind of understanding/autonomy support from coaches also is also most likely to contribute to the balance of need satisfaction across different life domains. The balance of need satisfaction between different contexts has proved to be significant for adjustment (Milyavskaya et al., 2009) and to prevent athlete burnout (Perreault et al., 2007). The evidence for the importance of

balance of needs is tentative, however (Ntoumanis, 2012). Thus, more research is warranted to explore this issue. The general autonomous orientation among the athletes might also have been an important prerequisite for openness, honesty and mutual understanding in the coach-athlete relationship and thus be an important contributor to the athletes' need satisfaction of relatedness as well (Hodgins et al., 1996). Still, it is important to recognize that although the athletes generally had an autonomous orientation and coaches who saw them as persons and not just as athletes, this does not necessarily mean that their need satisfaction of autonomy in relation to their coach cannot fluctuate as a consequence of the dynamic nature of coach- athlete relationships. This was for instance the case with athlete 1[F] who experienced feeling controlled in her everyday training when her coach did not show interest in her expertise and concrete preferences. When her perception of what she should do to develop her performance did not coincide with her coach's perception she was deprived of control over her own actions. Her description of the experience also indicated an anticipation of being able to influence her coach. In other words, there was an expectation of mutual influence which could create what she believed to be optimal interplay for performance enhancement. When this anticipation was not realized it reduced her need satisfaction of autonomy. Similar results emerged in a diary study among young female gymnasts where need satisfaction during practice as a result of perceived coach support predicts changes in well-being before and after practice (Gagné et al., 2003).

Athlete 5 [F]'s need to give her coach control over the development of her training plans also points to an important aspect of need fulfillment of autonomy. It is still possible to feel autonomous when one gives others control to influence one's behavior if this is perceived to be volitional (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Fulfillment of the need for competence

Training sessions where the coaches emphasized development and maintaining/building confidence were considered to be significant antecedents for need satisfaction of competence. Behavior change in terms of improved athletic skills is crucial for an elite athlete if he or she is to perform at the highest level over time. An important aspect in relation to this and the fulfillment of competence is the provision of structure (Markland & Vansteenkiste, 2007). Structure helps to create realistic expectations about the required behavior changes, and also contributes to athletes' belief that they can master the developmental requirements they are faced with. As development of athletic skills and maintenance of confidence are factors of the utmost importance in elite sport, it is reasonable to assume that the provision of structure can fulfill the need for competence.

Need satisfaction and thwarting of the need for relatedness

From the results it appears that the athletes' need for their coaches to have faith in them and their subsequent sense of security are relevant antecedents of need satisfaction of relatedness. It also appears that the coaches' ability to show faith in them also provided the athletes with a foundation from which to develop as it enabled them to have the necessary faith in their own skills, which is a fundamental aspect of performing at this level. Thus, it appears that the athletes' need satisfaction of relatedness through coach faith and a sense of security is an important premise for their further need fulfillment of competence. The fact that two of the athletes who experienced need thwarting of relatedness characterized it as their worst experience of their career also attests to the significance of this need being satisfied. Still, it is interesting to note that despite need thwarting of relatedness over time for athlete 5, it probably did not affect her performance as she continued to perform at the highest level. A possible explanation for this might be that thwarting of this need has the most negative effect on the interpersonal relationship between coach and athlete and

the athlete's general welfare. This again stresses the importance of taking care of the whole person and not just judging success in the light of performance. According to Ryan and Deci (2002), under conditions where need satisfaction is perceived as unavailable people will try to compensate by developing need substitutes. These substitutes can provide some kind of fulfillment, but will never contribute to true satisfaction of basic needs. As many elite athletes do not have the opportunity to choose the head coach of their national team, it would be interesting to conduct more research on how elite athletes handle being in a coach-athlete relationship where the basic needs are thwarted.

Athlete 5[F]'s emphasis that the coach did not do anything to improve their relationship might also be an interesting aspect in the light of the mechanisms of need support within coach-athlete relationships. Based on the difference in authority and their different roles there is probably a perception among athletes that it is the coach who is responsible for providing support to them and initiating the communication process if there is something wrong with their relationship. It is important that the coaches become aware of this expectation and, to some extent, obligation.

To summarize, study 1 provided us with insight into the perceived needs of elite athletes in relation to their coaches. It also provided information about how specific coaching behavior can influence them either negatively or positively. This kind of information is useful because it gives both coaches and sport psychologists a clearer picture of how coaches can specifically contribute to athletes' need satisfaction, and what kind of coaching behavior might lead to low need satisfaction or need thwarting. In other words, our findings give us more thorough understanding of the antecedents of need satisfaction among elite athletes.

Study 2

In the light of the findings that emerged from study

1 it was sensible to expand the next study to include elite-level coaches. It has been argued by some researchers that the coach-athlete relationship is not reciprocal. Indeed, Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, and Ryan (2006) argue that there is a lack of mutuality in relationships which involve an authority difference between two parties, because the subordinate party will not be expected to provide support to the superior one. This kind of authority difference is probably inherent in coach-athlete relationships, particularly in national teams where the head coach has the overall responsibility for the athletes' development. Even though the expectations of need support provision might be higher for the coaches, it might not necessarily mean that need support only functions one-way from coach to athlete. To our knowledge, there has not been any previous research on the degree of mutuality in need support within coach-athlete relationships (or any other relationships with an authority difference, for that matter). As a consequence, there has not been no research on the potential mutuality of need support between athletes and coaches in elite sport. Thus, the aim of the second study was to gain further insight into how elite coaches perceive their athletes to influence them and what they recognize as supportive athlete behavior.

Method

Participants

The participants in study 2 were also selected on the basis of their accomplishments in elite sport. Thus, the coaches all had to have extensive coaching experience working with athletes at this level. All the coaches who participated were male. They had all been head coach on a national team and trained athletes to win several gold medals in the Olympic Games and World Championships. The coaches had between 22 and 30 years of coaching experience with a mean of 20 years.

One of the coaches only coached females at the highest level; another coached only males, and two of them had worked with both males and females. At the time of the interview all the coaches had retired as elite coaches, but were still involved in elite sport in different roles.

Procedure

The invitation and information procedure was the same in study 2 as in study 1. Five coaches were invited to participate and all of them agreed to take part in the study. One of the coaches decided to withdraw from the study later, however. Thus, his interview was not included in the results.

Interview guide

Because study 2 was also part of a larger study, the interview guide covered the same main topics as in study 1 and formed the basis of the interview conversation. Study 2 is primarily focused on the needs the coaches had in relation to their athletes and how they perceived the athletes to influence them. Relevant questions in this regard included: "What do you think characterizes a good coach? How do you perceive yourself as a coach in terms of these characteristics?" "Do athletes have a responsibility to contribute to their coach being successful in his/her job?" "How did your athletes' contribute to building your confidence as a coach?" "What did you consider to be the most important characteristics in your relationship with your athletes?" "What does it mean to know an athlete well?" "What do you consider to be the most challenging part of a coach's job?" and "How involved were your athletes' in the planning process and evaluation of their training?"

Interview procedure and data analysis

The time and place for the interviews were arranged with each participant. Three of the interviews were conducted at the Olympic Training Center in Oslo and one interview was conducted at the participant's current workplace. Each participant was interviewed once. The interviews lasted from two hours to two and a half hours. After the interviews were conducted the further procedures and data analysis were carried out in the same manner as in study 1 with the only difference that in this study the coaches' needs in relation to their athletes represented the higher-order themes.

Results

Even though the interview themes were designed and developed based on the BPNT, the questions were rather open so that the participants could elaborate on what they perceived as been important. Thus, there were no statements that alluded to the fact that their relationship with the athletes influenced their need for autonomy, directly. However, when it came to the fulfillment of need to feel competent, a different picture emerged.

The need to feel competent

All of the coaches emphasized the importance of getting some sort of confirmation that the work they had put in contributed to the athletes' development; coach 3: *I feel like a good coach when someone whom I have worked with appreciates what I have done and says that I have done a good job.*

Coach 1 highlighted that he needed to see progress among his athletes, and that they were engaged and enthusiastic in regard to their training and their development to feel competent, as he felt that he had enabled this to take place. Coach 1 and coach 4 emphasized their need to see their athletes perform and achieve results, so when they saw that what they had focused on during training led to world-class performances they felt like good coaches.

For coach 3 it was also important to achieve results, but the most meaningful experience for him was the

dialogue with the athletes and their confidence in his expertise as a coach. In fact, the reason why he took the job as national coach in the first place was because the athletes believed that his competence would contribute to their development.

Coach 1 and 3 also elaborated about how their sense of competence was affected by the response from their athletes. Coach 1 expressed, on the one hand, that it was disconcerting to hear that he was not always able to provide feedback in a proper manner to his athletes, as he believed this was important for optimal interaction between them. On the other hand, he was also motivated by this kind of feedback from his athlete: *If I had done everything exactly right and they had then given me very little back in terms of feedback it would have had a negative influence on my motivation.* Coach 3 also reflected on how the athletes responded to his feedback. His perception of the quality of interactions was also to a large extent based on the response he got from his athletes:

If I left a session feeling that I had not contributed anything positive at all I had a very bad feeling. Then I was dissatisfied. I did not like to leave a conversation at training or a meeting with an athlete without having the feeling that we had made a good plan that we both agreed upon. And the feeling that I had was really based on the athlete's response, I would say.

Illustrating how the coaches need to feel competent in relation to their athletes, coach 2 said that he was told by one of his athletes that he did not live up to his expectations. The athlete was worried that what they were doing to prepare for the Olympics was not good enough and he said this directly to the coach. The coach, on the other hand, felt that he was working round the clock to help the athlete with his preparations. As his coach, he had great respect for the athlete for giving him the feedback, but it also made him sad because he got the feeling that he was not competent enough and that he was no use.

The need to know their athletes

For the coaches it was important that their athletes provided them with information about everything that could affect their training, including aspects of their life outside sport. The coaches also perceived it as necessary to know their athletes well enough to understand how they would react in stressful situations and their way of thinking when they succeeded and when their performance was not up to standard.

Coach 3: *You need to know their overall life situation so that you can see their training in context with everything else that they are doing. You do not necessarily have to know every detail of their life, but you need to know their priorities, their overall life situation in relation to studies, work, if they have problems at home and stuff like that which can affect their training.*

Coach 4: *You need to understand how they think when things go well and how they are thinking when they are under pressure. It means that you know how they are doing and that they are functioning in the arenas where they want to function.*

To sum up, in relation to their athletes the coaches were particularly concerned about getting to know their athletes well enough to be able to provide them with optimal coaching in every situation and to receive confirmation from their athletes that the work they put in was valuable.

Discussion

With regard to the coaches in this study, the findings overall indicate that coaches were influenced by the athletes they worked with. More specifically, the results revealed that at the elite level athletes represent an important contextual factor that helps to fulfill the needs coaches have in their job, and thus provide important antecedents of coaches need satisfaction of basic psychological needs. In other words, it appears that there is a form or level of reciprocity in

the coach-athlete relationship, as there are studies that support the fact that athletes perception of their coach being autonomy-supportive significantly predicts their need satisfaction of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Adie et al., 2008; Amorose et al., 2007;).

No relevant antecedents of need satisfaction of autonomy

An interesting aspect that emerged from the results among the coaches was that none of the needs they had in relation to their athletes represented relevant antecedents of need satisfaction of autonomy. This might not be surprising considering that autonomy support is, by definition, provided by an authority figure, which normally is not the case for athletes within the coach-athlete relationship. Yet this does not mean that athletes do not have the opportunity to influence their coach's feeling of autonomy. To what extent this is possible may vary depending, for instance, on cultural differences like the level of competition or the nature of the coach-athlete relationship (hierarchical or egalitarian). Future research should therefore investigate the important antecedents for coaches' need satisfaction of autonomy as satisfaction of all three needs is important for optimal functioning and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2002). It should also examine what coaches' perceive to be antecedents of need thwarting of autonomy as this might be different from those which contribute to need satisfaction (Bartholomew et al., 2011).

Need satisfaction and thwarting of the need for competence

The statements made by the coaches indicate that providing need support might also initiate the process of own need satisfaction as the athletic development of their athletes was an important source of information when the coaches judged their level of competence. To enable their athletes to experience optimal athletic development, their coaches probably provided them with competence support. Thus, when the coaches

provide competence support to their athletes, they contribute to their athletes' development, which again represents an antecedent for the coaches' need satisfaction of competence. These results also contribute to the argument that there is mutuality in need support among athletes and coaches at the elite level. As the coaches' need for competence was satisfied through both direct feedback from the athletes and through their perception of need fulfillment of competence among their athletes it shows that both providing and receiving need support contributed to need satisfaction among the coaches. Because the authority difference in the relationship is likely to provide different role expectations with regard to need support in the relationship, a dyadic study to examine the mechanisms of need support within coach-athlete relationships would appear to be relevant for future research.

Although it is often emphasized that it is important that athletes should develop both as a person as well as an athlete, one might still argue that the primary objective of the participants in this context is to achieve optimal performance and obtain good results. Consequently, it could be argued that this primary objective forms the basis for the establishment of the coach-athlete relationship. For the coach-athlete relationship to be maintained, both parties must find their own and the other's contributions optimal in their quest for performance development. Performance development, then, functions as confirmation that their partnership may lead to the athlete achieving results. The success of the coach is also in many ways seen as based on the success of his or her athletes (Olusoga et al., 2009), which is also confirmed by the coaches in this study. Thus, it explains how athletes' achievements contribute to the coaches' need satisfaction of competence. At the same time, the achievement of results at this level is very difficult and marked by a lot of uncertainty. The coaches' emphasis on the importance of having a productive dialogue with the athletes and coach 3's rating of the dialogue with his athletes as more meaningful than the achievement of results might

indicate that athletes' responses have a strong impact on the coaches' need fulfillment. When the athletes tell the coaches that they are doing a good job, they are telling them that they live up to their expectations, which might provide the coaches with a stronger sense of security in relation to their athletes. Constructive feedback might also be a more tangible sign of satisfaction with their collaboration than achievement of results which might be influenced by several other factors as well.

In the light of the results it appears that coach 1 did not experience reduced need satisfaction of competence when his athletes told him that he did not live up to their expectations. Part of the reason he did this could be because, after receiving this feedback, he chose to discuss with his athletes what he could do to improve. Consequently, the area in which he had potential for improvement was clarified and made more specific, which again might have contributed to a sense of control and perception of this as an optimal challenge.

In contrast to coach 1's experience, coach 2 experienced thwarting of his need for competence as a consequence of feedback from one of his athletes. Part of the reason why he perceived it in this manner might be that he never quite knew what he had to do to improve as he already felt that he was doing everything he could and that there was no room for further improvement. The athlete's expectations might then not have been perceived as achievable and made him feel inadequate. According to Bartholomew et al. (2011), feeling inadequate is a common feeling when one's needs are thwarted.

Fulfillment of the coaches' need for relatedness

To gain a sense of security in relation to their athletes and to enhance their opportunity to provide optimal coaching the coaches needed access to their athletes' experiences, thoughts and feelings. If athletes develop enough trust to give their coaches this personal information and also understand that knowing these things allows coaches to do the best job possible, this can be an important contribution to coaches' need satisfaction of relatedness.

Although it was not explained in detail what exactly the coaches did to establish this sense of security among the athletes, their statements nevertheless indicates that they were interested in their athletes' experiences, perspectives and interests. This kind of behavior is consistent with the definition of autonomy-supportive behavior, which supports the satisfaction of all three basic psychological needs (Adie et al., 2008; Mageau & Vallerand, 200;). According to Hodgins et al. (1996) autonomous people disclose more and are more honest, but in a socially desirable manner adjusted to the given type of relationship. In other words, they do it with people they perceive as close when they perceive them to be honest and self-disclosing. It therefore appears that providing autonomy support to their athletes and thus contributing to their need satisfaction might also contribute to the athletes disclosing relevant personal information to their coaches, which further contributes to their coaches' need satisfaction of relatedness. In other words, giving autonomy support to their athletes might be what initiated the process of need satisfaction for coaches. A possible explanation may be the difference of authority between coach and athlete and the expectation and understanding that it is the coaches who are responsible for supporting their athletes in their development and not the other way round. The fact that there is an authority difference between them does not mean, however, that a reciprocal process does not exist. Future studies should try and tap into how much a coach should disclose in order for the athlete to feel the same type of relatedness or whether, in fact, we may talk about different levels of need for relatedness in this respect.

To summarize, the findings in study 2 showed that elite coaches are indeed influenced by their athletes and that they have perceived needs in relation to them that, if satisfied, can represent important antecedents of

need satisfaction of competence and relatedness. With regard to need satisfaction of autonomy, the coaches did not have any perceived needs in relation to their athletes that were considered to be potential antecedents of this need. The findings of study 2 also revealed that athletes can contribute to need thwarting among coaches.

General Discussion

If we assume that the relationship between elite athletes and coaches is reciprocal, an interesting next step is then to compare the results in study 1 and study 2.

According to Jowett (2003) communication in terms of dialogue, talk and self-disclosure is what builds a relationship. Considering this in relation to the results of study 1 and 2, it is likely that athletes and coaches will support each other's need satisfaction through various forms of communication. For instance, the athletes' need to be volitional with regard to decisions concerning their life and training and the coaches' need to know their athletes and their thoughts and feelings to be able to provide optimal coaching might be viewed as two sides of the same coin, as an open dialogue and self-disclosure about these matters can be assumed to contribute to both parties' need satisfaction.

Several studies of sport have already confirmed that coaches contribute to athletes' need satisfaction through autonomy-supportive coaching behavior (Pope & Wilson, 2012; Sheldon & Watson, 2011). Deci et al. (2006), however, found that in close friendships (reciprocal relationships) both giving and receiving autonomy support contributes to need satisfaction and perception of relationship quality. Thus, an important area for dyadic studies on the coach-athlete relationship within SDT would be examining how the process of need satisfaction takes place within this relationship and its influence on relationship quality.

In study 1 it was revealed that two of the athletes (athlete 1[F] and athlete 5[F]) had different preferences when it came to their level of involvement in parts of their training. Still, both preferences are considered to be antecedents of need satisfaction of autonomy. One of the reasons we chose to employ in-depth interviews as our methodological approach was to bring out the small nuances that can make a big difference for the individual athlete. For elite coaches, this kind of detailed information is of the utmost importance as it determines the quality of athletes' training and development (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002). It is also fair to assume that coaches who act on this kind of detailed information will contribute positively to athletes' perception of competence and their level of confidence and thus contribute to their need satisfaction of competence. As the coaches emphasized their dialogue with the athletes and their response to training as an important source of information when judging their competence as coaches this scenario would probably also contribute to the coaches' need fulfillment of competence. Still, more research with the use of dyadic coach-athlete relationships is warranted to explore the process of need support and need satisfaction for both athletes and coaches.

When we compare the results of study 1 and 2 there is one final aspect that is worth emphasizing and that is the possible effects of athletes' perception of need thwarting on coaches' need fulfillment. In study 1, two of the athletes felt rejected and actively opposed by their coaches. Such an experience would probably lead to suboptimal dialogue with the coach. A likely ripple effect of this is that several of the other needs of both the athlete and the coach will suffer. Thus, it is fair to assume that if athletes perceive their needs to be thwarted it will also lead to their coach experiencing low need satisfaction or need thwarting depending on their perception of their needs not being sufficiently met or actively rejected by their athletes (Bartholomew et al., 2011). More research is needed to investigate the process of low need satisfaction and/or need thwarting within coach-athlete relationships and how this affects both athletes and coaches.

Conclusion

The findings of study 1 and 2 have given us more insight into the antecedents of need satisfaction and need thwarting of both elite athletes and coaches. These findings have thus provided us with more in-depth understanding of the mutuality of need support within the coach-athlete relationship at the elite level.

Possible limitations of these two studies are to the extent to which we have been able to interpret the informants' statements and uncover meaning that goes beyond the spoken word. There is also a possibility that our own a priori knowledge has not been obvious to us, at least not to a level where we could be fully aware of how it has colored our interpretations. Both authors have spent considerable time with elite-level athletes (and coaches) and one of us has been working with Olympic-level athletes for more than two decades. Thus, some of this knowledge is clearly tacit knowledge and can influence the interpretation process in ways of which we are unaware.

One last limitation is the fact that we used SDT as the framework to discuss our findings. Although this is a dominant theoretical framework within sport psychology research at present, there may be other equally suitable frameworks that could help us explain or highlight the findings revealed by this study. The results showed, however, that coaches are indeed influenced by their athletes and that they have specific needs in relation to them. The recognition of the coach-athlete relationship as a reciprocal relationship should therefore be taken into consideration in future research on the coach-athlete relationship within the framework of SDT.

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Paper II

Frøyen, A. F., Pensgaard, A. M., & Gustafsson, H. (2020). «You can be my coach, but I am the one in charge» An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the importance of the coach-athlete relationship in Norwegian super-elite athletes. *International Journal of Applied Sports Sciences,* 32(1), 49-68.

"You can be my coach, but I am the one in charge"

An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the importance of

the coach-athlete relationship in Norwegian super-elite athletes

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of the coach-athlete relationship for two Norwegian male super-elite athletes. By means of semi-structured interviews and the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) the results revealed four emergent themes that represent underlying dynamics that influenced the athletes' perception of what constitute an effective coach-athlete relationship; 1) Extreme independence. 2) Coaching without skills? 3) The coach as a butler, and 4) Expectations – make it or break it. These underlying dynamics are further discussed using the theoretical frameworks of coping strategies and power with the need for control as an important common denominator.

Key words: world-class sport, relationship dynamics, power, super-elite athletes, IPA

Introduction

According to Jowett and Cockerill (2002), the coach-athlete relationship refers to all situations in which a coach's and an athlete's thoughts, feelings and behaviours are reciprocally and mutually related. In regard to the conceptualization of the coach-athlete relationship, the most widely used framework is the 3+1c model by Jowett (Jowett, Paull, Pensgaard, Hoegmo, & Riise, 2005). The model consists of four key properties;

closeness (e.g. the extent to which the coach and the athlete care for, support and value each other), commitment (e.g. the coach and the athlete's intention to maintain their relationship), complementarity (e.g. how the coach and athlete's behaviours correspond and complement each other), and co-orientation (e.g. the degree to which the coach and the athlete have a common ground about the nature of their relationship). Taken together, these four relational constructs define the relationship quality between the coach and each athlete in a team or a squad (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). Several studies have emphasized the importance of the coach-athlete relationship given that high relationship quality is associated with effective coaching

behaviours (Olympiou, Jowett & Duda, 2008) and more satisfaction with training, performance and coach treatment (Jowett, Shanmugam, & Caccoulis, 2012).

However, several studies have also shown that coaches are considered a significant stressors for athletes (Arnold & Fletcher, 2012; Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, Dieffenbach, & McCann, 2001; Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005; Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998), and in a study conducted with the purpose to investigate how the coach-athlete relationship affected athletes' stress appraisals, the results revealed that commitment was positively associated with threat appraisals, indicating that there might be some negative implications of having a highly committed coach-athlete relationship (Nicholls et al., 2016). These results are interesting because they shed light on the complexities claimed to exist in the coach-athlete relationship. In fact, according to Cushion (2010), there is a need to further investigate the complex relationship that exist between the coach and the athlete more deeply, as coaching is a social activity that is always influenced by the opportunities, but also the constraints, associated with human interaction.

Super-elite athletes (gold medallists at the Olympics or World Championships) have not just managed to achieve very high performance levels, they have also demonstrated the ability to perform exceptionally well under the extremely challenging circumstances faced by world-class athletes (Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2007; Jones & Hardy, 1990). In fact, there is now a growing recognition that there are subtle, yet decisive differences between those athletes who win gold at the Olympics and World Championships, and those athletes (elite-athletes) who compete at the international level, but who do not achieve medals (Hardy et al., 2017; Rees et al., 2016). According to Hardy et al. (2017) super-elite athletes have, compared to elite-athletes, an elevated need for success, they are more obsessive or perfectionistic in regard to their training and performance, they are also more ruthless and selfish in their quest for success, and they place the relative importance of sport over other aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships. The characteristics of being ruthless and selfish in their quest for success, and placing sport over interpersonal relationships are not necessarily compatible with relationship quality operationalized through the 3c+1c model if this also applies to the coach. Since there is now a growing recognition that there are differences between super-elite athletes compared to elite athletes (also called super-champs or super-champions) (Collins & Macnamara, 2017; Collins, MacNamara, & McCarthy, 2016; Hardy et al., 2017; Rees et al., 2016) it is also interesting to explore how these differences might affect such an important relationship as the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2005).

Based on an interest in the dynamics and the complexities of the coach-athlete relationship, and the small, but decisive differences between super-elite athletes and elite athletes, the purpose of this study was to explore the underlying dynamics that operate within the coach-athlete relationship seen from the perspective of these unique individuals. Since cultural aspects can impact the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016), it is worth noting that there is an egalitarian culture in Scandinavia. Scandinavians appreciate the value of low power distance as this promotes and provides egalitarian values. Delegation of responsibility is also a dominant feature of Scandinavian management (Warner-Søderholm, 2012).

Because the purpose of this study was to obtain a detailed understanding of this unique athlete group, the use of a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate. This is supported by other researchers who argue that a qualitative approach may be particularly suited when your goal is to obtain detailed information about significant or specific groups, in this case world-class athletes (Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999; Simonton, 1999). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative method that is considered to be particularly suitable if one is interested in elucidating complex or dynamic phenomena (Smith & Osborn, 2003), in this

case the coach-athlete relationship. Our interest was to establish a contextualized perspective of these super-elite athletes' experiences related to the coach-athlete relationship, and as the purpose of IPA is detailed analysis of personal experiences, the importance of these experiences to the participants, and how they attach meaning to these experiences (Smith, 2011), it was therefore chosen as the methodology for this study.

Method

IPA is a qualitative methodology developed in the field of psychology. Using an ideographic approach with its theoretical foundation in phenomenology and hermeneutics, IPA can provide unique insight into personal meaning making (Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Several theoretical positions within phenomenological philosophy provide the phenomenological foundation of IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Particularly evident is, however, Husserl and his concern about finding the essence of experience. Still, in IPA, this aspect is modified to the attempt to capture particular experiences as experiences for specific people (Smith et al., 2009). From Heidegger, the most significant contribution to IPA is the recognition that meaning-making necessarily entails an interpretative process for both the participant and the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2015). In this regard, the IPA's theoretical grounding in hermeneutics also becomes evident as the researcher tries to make sense of the participant's attempt to make sense of their experiences, which implies a double hermeneutics. Based on this foundation, it is of particular importance within IPA that there is a close link between the account coming from the participant and the interpretive analysis conducted by the researcher (Smith, 2017). Although we consider IPA to be the most appropriate method for this study, it is still worth noting that the phenomenological grounding of IPA has led to criticism from those situated within more structured or purely phenomenological methods (Giorgi, 2011; van Manen,

2018). In an attempt to clarify the practical implications of IPA's theoretical grounding in both phenomenology and hermeneutics, it may be appropriate to say that phenomenology has been an important inspirational source for IPA, but that its main focus is on interpretation (hermeneutics) (Miller, Cronin, & Baker, 2015).

The foundations in ideography can be seen in IPA's focus on specifics. This is particularly apparent in two areas: a focus on details and in-depth analysis; and the researcher's duty to recognise how an experiential phenomenon has been interpreted through the lens of a specific group of people in a specific context. This is also the main reason why IPA emphasises that there should be small strategic samples in studies that use IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

Participants

The participants in this study were two Norwegian male athletes in individual sports who had performed at the super-elite level over an extended period of time, and they were both Olympic gold medallists. The inclusion criteria chosen were that the participants should have two or more medals from world championships, Olympic Games or competitions at an equivalent level. The participants had been professional, full-time athletes who made a living as sportsmen, but they had both retired when the interviews took place. Since IPA takes an idiographic approach, with the aim of understanding a specific phenomenon in a specific context, there is a strong emphasis on performing a detailed analysis of each individual case (Smith et al., 2009). On account of this exhaustive analytical process, studies that use IPA often have a small sample size (Smith & Osborn, 2007), which was also the case in this study. In line with the recommendations for IPA, the participants in this study were relatively homogeneous as they were both men, they were approximately the same age, they both competed in individual sport over an extended time period, and most importantly, both of them had won Gold in the

Olympics. They were both strategically selected for the purpose of the study (Smith et al., 2009).

Procedure

The athletes received information about the study and an invitation to participate in writing. It was stressed that participation in the study was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study if they so wished without having to give any reasons. It was also emphasised that the interviews would be treated confidentially. In order to ensure this confidentiality, the names of the participants are replaced with Athlete 1 and Athlete 2. The data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews. In its entirety, the interview guide consisted of questions and prompts intended to disclose experiences and contextual details, and how the participant made sense of these. As researchers, in order to be given access to the participants' stories and experiences, we needed them to trust us sufficiently to open up and talk freely. To build sufficient trust is a central aspect to this kind of phenomenological work because, as a researcher, you are dependent on the participants to tell a stranger about their personal experiences (Nicholls, Holt, & Polman, 2005). To facilitate rapport, we started each interview with a conversation about the participant's career, how it all started and developed, important events early in their career and their experience of being an elite athlete over an extended period. As the aim of IPA is to understand how participants view a specific phenomenon in a specific context (Smith et al., 2009), we also included questions that gave the participants an opportunity to describe their experiences of the context of elite sport and of being a part of that context. Later in the interview the questions homed in on the participants' experiences, feelings and views on the coach-athlete relationship, with an emphasis on using wordings that encouraged the participants to tell their stories, such as: "Can you describe your relationships with your coaches?", "What has been your experience of changing coach?", "Can

you describe an incident or episode where the relationship between you and your coach could have worked better?", "What do you consider to be the most important job of the coach of a (national) team?", "With hindsight, is there anything that you wish your coaches had not done?". One aspect of the phenomenological approach that was essential at this point was that the researcher invited the participant to give detailed descriptions of actual experiences that had occurred. In addition to these general topics and questions, there were follow-up questions such as: "How did you feel about that?", "What did you think about that?", "How did you react to that?" and "Would you do the same again?". Every effort was made to ensure that the interviews drew out the participants' views on, and assessments of, the coach-athlete relationship in elite sport in order to understand their story, and not our definition or interpretation of the importance of this relationship for athletes at this level. This approach is also in accordance with the phenomenological foundation in which the participant is considered to be the expert, and it is his/her experiences and opinions that he/she associates with those of interest to the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

As the participants themselves were allowed to choose where they wanted to be interviewed, one of the interviews took place at the athlete's home, while the other one took place in a meeting room at the participant's current workplace. Audio recordings were made of the interviews, and the recordings were written up verbatim.

As this study was part of a larger research project[1], the interviews were relatively long, with one of them lasting 1 hour 48 minutes and the other one lasting 2 hours 50 minutes. The first author carried out both interviews.

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[1] As these super elite athletes retired from their outstanding careers we conducted an interview covering several psychological aspects related to performance in world class sport, including the coach-athlete relationship.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed in their entirety by the first author in order to facilitate further detailed analyses. The analysis of each case largely followed the four steps set out in Smith et al. (2009). The first step of the analysis primarily involved familiarising ourselves with the transcript, in order to gain a thorough knowledge of the participants. The transcript was therefore read repeatedly before performing any further analysis. During the process of interpretation, it is vital for the researcher to continuously reflect on and be aware of his or her own preconceptions about the data, and strive not to be influenced by them, in order to fully focus on the experiences and experiential world of the participant. In practice, this meant that the first author, who conducted the analysis, spent time articulating and clarifying her own preconceptions related to the topic before she initiated the analysis as a starting point of the hermeneutical circle. This initial bracketing was carried out both independently and in collaboration with the second author. To preserve the cyclical approach to bracketing (Smith et al., 2009), the first author continued to reflect openly with the second author throughout the process of analysis. During the analytical process, the focus of the research switches back and forth between what the participant is saying and the researcher's own interpretation of the account and its meaning. This results in a double hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2009). Naturally following on from the first step, a more extensive textual analysis took place, focusing on the participants' thoughts and experiences with respect to the coach-athlete relationship. Here the principal aim was to produce comprehensive, detailed comments on, and annotations to, the data (Smith & Osborn, 2003). These exploratory annotations highlight the phenomenological perspective of IPA, as the analytical focus is directed at the participants' explicit statements and at how they attempt to attach meaning to their feelings and experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

In other words, the interpretations that were made at this stage of the analysis were based on the participants' statements, and not on any theoretical models and/or frameworks. These comprehensive annotations then provided the foundation for the next step of the analysis: developing the emergent themes. In practice, the process of identifying the emergent themes involved focusing on various parts of the transcript without losing sight of the overall picture provided by the initial annotations (Smith et al., 2009). The purpose of this dual focus was to identify the main themes that emerged, while also keeping hold of the complexity and interconnections from the previous analyses. This part of the analytical process is a good illustration of the hermeneutic circle, where what has previously been analysed as a whole is split into several parts, before being reconstructed as a new whole prior to the final analysis and presentation of the results (Smith et al., 2009). In order to do this as successfully as possible, we next focused on how to stitch together the emergent themes and create a structure that would allow us to clearly get across what we considered to be the most interesting and important aspects of what the participants had emphasised in their stories (Smith et al., 2009). The whole process was repeated for both cases. In the final step of the analytical process, we searched for patterns in the two cases by looking at their similarities and differences. This comparison revealed several similarities between the accounts of the two participants. Nevertheless, although there were sufficient similarities for some aspects of the two participants' accounts to be encompassed by the same general theme, they still had unique experiences within that theme. Their unique experiences were interesting in their own right, but perhaps most of all because, within the common theme, one of the cases helped to nuance and illuminate the other case. All three authors have worked with elite athletes for a long time, giving them a unique personal insight from having experienced the context of elite sport from the inside.

Results

The purpose of this study was to improve our knowledge and understanding of the feelings and experiences of two male super-elite athletes in individual sports with respect to the dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship. There were four principal emergent themes; 1) Extreme independence, 2) Coaching without skills?, 3) The coach as a butler, and 4) Expectations – make it or break it.

Extreme independence

As elite athletes, they had taken personal responsibility for their own performance development. They were the independent drivers of their own process towards achieving the requirements of elite sport. Athlete 1 stated very clearly that he only focused on himself and on what it was important for him to prioritise in order to perform to the best of his ability:

Personally, as an athlete, I did not have anything to do with sports policy and sports organisations. I was up there with the worst of them in terms of being an extreme individualist, and for me elite sport was all about structure and focus. Daily, weekly, monthly, annual structure and focus. First you establish the structure and then you focus on sticking to it; that is what elite sport is all about. What The Top Sport Centre did, what the federation did and what event organisers did, I really could not care less, I only focused on what could hopefully improve my performance. Extremely egotistical and no doubt not very nice.

Expressing himself very clearly and fluently, Athlete 1 tells us the story of his life as a super-elite athlete. He knows the story well, and he has a thoughtful, self-aware relationship to it. In doing so, he clearly defines what elite sport is all about, and also what it is not about. For him, it was about including and excluding things, and the only things he included were

related to performance and things he could control. This also applies to other people, and Athlete 1 chose to behave in a manner that in many ways was incompatible with good, close relationships, justifying it with the contextual requirements of elite sport. The fact that Athlete 1 prioritised maximising his performance development over maintaining relationships is even clearer from the following passage:

When I was an athlete, I was probably better suited to an individual sport than a team sport, but if I had been in a team, I think I would have had exactly the same attitude: I'll do my thing and if I think the coach is not helping me to optimise my training and performance, I'll say that, and if that means I will not be on the team then so what, it is their loss [chuckles] […]. Obviously that is not so easy if you're eighteen or nineteen and you're not sure if you have the courage.

Again, we can see the categorical and uncompromising attitude that underpins what Athlete 1 believes are the right choices. If he feels that something or someone, including the coach, is not supporting his performance development, he excludes them from the world of his sporting performance by taking away their ability to influence him. At the same time, he recognises that it would not be as easy for a younger athlete to take this self-centred approach. What is it, then, that makes it so much easier for him? It is not so much a question of age, but rather of differences in performance level and past results: having achieved certain results gives you certain possibilities that you do not have if your performance level is lower. His achievements as one of the best athletes in his sport over an extended period mean that Athlete 1 undoubtedly understands what elite sport involves and what is required to perform at that level, and in one sense, that protects him against any attack from outsiders. It also gives him the power of definition with respect to how things should be done and what the right

choices are. Having the authority required to justify an uncompromising and self-centred attitude, which in many other contexts would be considered socially unacceptable, is a privilege of power that is only granted to the very best. They can allow themselves to be more individualistic than athletes performing at a lower level.

Athlete 2 is not as clear and fluent in what he says, but it still becomes apparent that he was strongly individualistic as an athlete. Here he describes what he considers the defining trait of elite athletes in Norway:

A: Norwegian athletes are very independent-minded – they coach themselves – but the further east you head in Europe, the more it becomes the coach who is the boss, and I know of athletes my age who have never planned a training session in their lives, which seems really weird to me [chuckles].

Q: Do you think that elite sport, or elite [his sport], has developed a lot in recent years?

A: The athletes who do well have not changed a lot.

Q: What are the athletes who do well like?

A: [Pause, he chuckles] I think they are extremely focused on their goals. I think they are willing to do what is needed of them to reach their goals [pause]; that is what I think … to summarise … to summarise briefly.

Being independent-minded is not just about being independent. As an independent-minded person, you are also the brains behind your training. You design it, and make choices and decisions; you do not just implement a training programme independently. Athlete 2 also views the move towards having a coach who is the boss as something negative or sub-optimal. According to Athlete 2, the right thing is for the athlete to be in charge. If the athlete believes this, it will have a major impact on how the dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship develop. The relationship between the coach and athlete exists because they want to achieve something, which in elite sport means performing at an exceptionally high level, and consequently obtaining results and positions. Athlete 2 also laughs at other athletes who have not planned their own training sessions. It goes against his view of what he as an elite athlete should be responsible for, and for him it represents a completely unthinkable relationship dynamic. For an athlete to relinquish the power to define his training regime is a sign of weakness, and it is something that he would never have been willing to do. Albeit somewhat more subtly expressed than in the case of Athlete 1, the picture that crystallises from what Athlete 2 says is of an athlete who puts himself in the driving seat and who demands the power to define, control and take responsibility for his own training and development as an athlete.

When he goes on to describe athletes who do well, he appears to use language as a kind of barrier. He is unwilling to fully reveal what defines athletes who succeed at the very highest level of sport. He becomes more hesitant in his choice of words, and he only wants to "summarise briefly". He also refers to "Norwegian athletes" and "athletes who do well". Given his performance level and achievements, it is natural to describe him as a Norwegian athlete who did well, and hence assume that he is talking about himself. Nevertheless, he uses language to create distance between the contents of what he is saying and himself as a person. The following statement illustrates even more clearly how Athlete 2 also uses what can be interpreted as inclusion and exclusion mechanisms to define the closeness of his relationship with his coaches and the amount he is willing to be influenced by them:

I am quite clear on what I want, although I'm open to getting feedback and new ideas, but equally I apply quite a fine filter to extract the things I think will help me to improve, so [pause] coaches need to have really good arguments before I listen to them.

The extreme selectivity that Athlete 2 refers to here highlights the power he had in his relationships with coaches. He was free to choose whether or not he wanted to take onboard their suggestions by implementing them in his plan and changing his conduct. It may appear that his results provided irrefutable evidence that he knew what it took to be a world-class athlete, and this justified the fact that the coach did not automatically have the chance to influence him. Rather, it was a vote of confidence if he did have the chance, as changing one's training regime at this level is very risky: any deterioration in performance and hence in results can be very damaging to an athlete in both the short and long term.

Coaching without skills?

I think coaches too often, either because of their formal qualifications or the athletes they've trained in the past, gain a slightly unjustified authority. In my opinion, a population of 4-5 million people is not really enough to choose athletes from, and then it is definitely not enough to pick really good coaches from.

Athlete 1 is fundamentally sceptical of coaches and their skills, and he considers that they have too much authority. Here he appears to be referring to the kind of authority that results in a coach automatically having the right and ability to decide what an athlete should do to improve, rather than the athlete taking ownership of his own project, making his own choices and challenging the coach's opinions and knowledge. This is also clearly illustrated by his description of what he considers a good coach-athlete relationship to involve:

I think it involves keeping the lines of communication open, so you can give both criticism and praise, and it has to be a two-way process. It has to be acceptable for the coach to give constructive criticism to the athlete, and then it is almost essential for athletes these days to be so conscious of what they are doing, of their training, that they are qualified to give constructive criticism in the other direction as well. I feel that I've seen too many set-ups where the coach has a one-way communication line down to the athlete, without any guarantee that the coach has the expertise to justify that one-way communication.

This is the kind of practice that Athlete 1 did not want to be a part of, as he considered it to be fundamentally wrong, and it is why he did not let coaches influence matters relating to his training programme. He considered the latter to be his own project, and he wanted to take responsibility for it himself, as he was the only person who through his performances had demonstrated that he knew what it took to perform at this level. Letting a coach get closely involved in the things that are of decisive importance to his performance development was a risk he was unwilling to take, as he did not have any guarantee that the coach had the necessary knowledge. He is completely categorical about this, and it applies to all coaches in Norway, as he believes that the total population is too small for there to be suitably qualified coaches. His statement shows that essentially it was very difficult for anyone to be considered a qualified coach in his eyes. In view of his previous claim that he was the only person qualified to have an opinion about his training and performance development, it appears that having performed at a high level as an athlete has more impact on whether he considers a coach properly qualified than courses and coaching experience. This is also underlined by his statements about his involvement in his own training programme:

I always wanted to have the last word, because I'm the person who knows what I can and cannot do; the coach does not know that, he does not have a clue.

Athlete 2, on the other hand, had greater trust in his

coaches and their knowledge about sport. As a result, he also included them to a greater extent than Athlete 1;

> At the sports high school there was an incredible coach, Coach 1, who believed in the simple things, who you really trusted and who often said the right things. Then there was Coach 2 who cared PASSIONATELY [capitalised by first author to show that the word was stressed by the participant], and he had new ideas every … practically every week, but he lacked the continuity of Coach 1. Then there was the first period with Coach 3 as my coach. Kept things just as simple as Coach 1, believed in the simple things, not very sociable in terms of bringing the group together, but managed to unite the team in spite of that … Then with Coach 4 who was … who maybe slowed me down in my training and was more cautious, but incredibly motivational in terms of good technique. Then a year with Coach 5 as my coach [pause]. Very similar to Coach 3, but maybe not … not quite innovative enough for my liking, but still motivating and stuck to the simple things, but I felt a bit too much he was like a supply teacher at school [we chuckle], if you get my drift [laughs].

When describing the various coaches he had over the course of his career, Athlete 2 judges each coach on the basis of criteria related to the traits and skills he considers important for coaches, which are those that will maximise development and performance. At the same time, he compares the coaches with one another. It appears that Athlete 2 has very clear opinions about the criteria he uses to judge the quality of a coach. Coach 4 "slowed (him) down" in his training, and did not contribute to his development in the way that he wanted. The way in which the coach went about his work did not entirely correspond with Athlete 2's view of what a coach should do. This negatively affected Athlete 2's assessment of the coach's quality, but it was counteracted by the coach's strong skills in some other

areas. Athlete 2 shows an acceptance that coaches cannot be equally good in all areas. A coach can have strengths and weaknesses, but overall the coach must meet Athlete 2's quality standards. If that is not the case, Athlete 2 will distance himself from the coach, taking away the coach's ability to influence him, which will presumably also affect the quality of the relationship between them. Athlete 2 goes on to describe how he distanced himself from a coach and blocked his ability to influence training decisions when the coach no longer lived up to his expectations and requirements:

> […] and then I went back to Coach 3 for the last years of my career; he was maybe more of an adviser and manager than a coach now, and he became less and less of one, for me at least, in my eyes, although he disagreed, and then I had those three or four years when I had really decided on the right way for me, which was really motivating.

When the coach no longer met Athlete 2's requirements for the role, he was downgraded from a coach to more of an adviser or manager in the athlete's eyes. Athlete 2 was unwilling to compromise with his own convictions on what was needed to become the best, so he followed his own programme independently of the coach.

Athlete 1 is more unequivocal than Athlete 2 in his statements. Nevertheless, it is clear that both of them are classic individualists who prioritise themselves and their own performance development above all else. It is their personal assessments of quality that inform their decisions, regardless of what other people might think. This also applies to their experiences with respect to their coaches.

The coach as a butler

Athlete 1's unwillingness to let other people have any

say on matters relating to his performance inevitably affects his description of the roles that coaches have played for him:

No, they're coordinators, they play a big role in ensuring creativity, I think, creating variation, keeping you from getting bored, and then coaches are, and that is what I see today as well, they're basically administrators, in other words they make sure that the flights are booked and that the hotel room is there for you when you go on training camp, and that you get picked up at the airport, which is an important role as well.

[The coach] helped to make my day-to-day life easier, did some of the stuff to do with sponsors, arranged some training sessions, made sure there were always training facilities available, structured the training a bit so that it was appropriate, obviously created a bit of variation in my training, to get the right balance. A purely practical function, really.

Through his exclusion and inclusion mechanisms, he reduced the coach's role to responsibility for ensuring that everything surrounding him was perfectly taken care of, so that he himself could focus single-mindedly on completing high-quality training sessions. This clear description of the coach's role and of the purpose of the relationship supports the idea of an instrumental coach-athlete relationship, established in order to achieve specific goals and with a very clear division of responsibilities. Athlete 1 goes on to describe his relationships with his coaches as follows:

It was a lot of fun, socially it was really important, and important to me feeling happy. It is important to have some time off, even at training camps, there are many things you can do between sessions that helps you to recover properly mentally as well, and not just physically; to have a chance to chat about things that are nothing to do with sport, you

know, and obviously you can also discuss your training, but it is just as important as a catalyst, really.

It is only in conjunction with the need for socialising that other people and relationships become really important to him, as it is impossible to have a good time socialising on one's own. For the coach to satisfy this need, there must be some kind of emotional tie based on the coach and athlete enjoying each other's company, and their social interaction must actually promote happiness and mental recovery. Nevertheless, you do not need coaching skills to successfully fulfil this role. At a training camp, the coach meets this need because it is natural for a coach to be there with the athlete. During normal training at home, it could be just as natural for other people to perform this function. In view of Athlete 1's previous statements, one can assume that if the nature of the social interaction had not promoted his happiness, relaxation and mental recovery, the coach would probably have been excluded or replaced, as he would not have been helping to make the athlete's day-to-day life easier. Instead, he would have been considered a disturbance.

Athlete 2's comments also make it clear that his relationship with his coaches was instrumental, and that both parties had to live up to certain requirements and expectations:

I think they've been good [his relationship with his coaches]; I think I've always been very fair. I think I've said relatively early on if there is anything that … um … is not working […], and I've yet to find a coach who has challenged me too much or who has set standards that I have not been able to achieve. Looking back, I slightly regret not having experienced that, but I've always appreciated an argument or a discussion, whether it is about the type of coach or the coaching philosophy.

He uses the word "fair" to describe his behaviour in relationships. This shows that he is comparing himself according to something, in this case probably on what he required and expected of his coaches, and on how he handled the situation when he felt that his coaches were not living up to his standards. This shows that his relationships with his coaches were primarily instrumental, and that he measures the quality of those relationships against a scale based on the extent to which the coaches met his requirements and expectations. At the same time, he points out that he has always expected and required more of himself than those around him have. There may be a sense of reassurance and satisfaction to be had from never having failed to meet other people's requirements and expectations. At least according to his own judgement.

Arguments and discussions are also factors that can definitely affect the quality of a relationship. Athlete 2 considers them positive because they were about the type of coach and coaching philosophy. These are the two areas that Athlete 2 considers must conform to his view of what is optimal for his development. It is also agreement and satisfaction with respect to these two matters that determines his assessment of the quality of his relationship with his coaches. Furthermore, Athlete 2's positive attitude towards getting new coaches reflects the fact that he did not build close emotional ties to them;

> Q: What has been your experience of changing coach during your career?
> A: Very good. Getting fresh blood into a team, getting new opinions, a new focus.
> Q: Does it take you a long time to build up trust with new coaches?
> A: No [pause], not really.

They are in a relationship because they want to achieve results. The performance demands are so high that they are the only thing Athlete 2 cares about, and they determine whether or not a relationship is maintained. The reference to the benefit of getting "fresh blood" into the team is also indicative of the instrumentality of the relationship, and of the fact that everything is judged in terms of the contribution a coach makes to further progress.

Expectations – make it or break it

Based on the analyses, an emergent theme for both athletes is expectations of their coaches and how close or distant a relationship they wanted with them. Nevertheless, there are differences between them in this area, on account of the varying extents to which they included their coaches in their training and their differing expectations of their coaches and the coaching role. Athlete 2's account contained distinct observations and experiences that were of significance and relevance to his relationship dynamics with the coach, thus his experiences were given more space under this topic.

As we have seen previously, Athlete 1 categorically excluded the coach from his "innermost" performance development process. This appear to have protected him against the coach becoming a disturbance;

> Q: Could the coach have any negative impact on you? For example if the practical arrangements were not in place, or any other things?
> A: No, not really, because I've always said it is me, and just me, who is responsible for my performance; I have to do the […] every single metre, no one is there to […] for me, not during training, not during competition, I have to lift the weights myself, I have to do the explosiveness training myself, I have to do the base miles, the intervals; so it is just me, I do not want anyone else to get involved, I have to do it myself.
> Q: Have you ever been faced with someone having different expectations of the coach-athlete relationship than you?

A: No, not personally, but maybe that is because I'm a bit like, you know [chuckles] […]. 'You're welcome to be my coach, but I'm the one in charge.

Q: If he [the coach] does not have the same expectations, he has to develop them?

A: No, there is more respect than that, you know. But I did not see it as a … as an absolute necessity to have that relationship, to have a coach around me or to have one in place. Ninety percent of what I did was done without my coach being present.

By acting in accordance with his insistence on having sole responsibility for his training, Athlete 1 simultaneously minimises the risks associated with becoming dependent on other people or vulnerable to their ability to affect him. He has absolute power of definition over how things should be done and how they should proceed. This position of power also allows him to make choices without having to consider what other people, including his coaches, might think of them. The coach must do whatever fits in with his perception of what will maximise his chances of performing well. How this affects the coach's perception of him as a person or the quality of their relationship is irrelevant, as the only thing that matters is performance development. In addition to the thematic content of Athlete 1's account, it is worth noting his comment that "No, I mean there is more respect than that, you know". Here he corrects my interpretation of what he has said. In other words, he shows that he wants the message that comes across to be credible and truthful. To ensure that, he stresses that there was more respect in the relationship, and that he had more respect for the work of the coach, than first author as the interviewer initially interpreted him as implying. This statement may also appear to authenticate Athlete 1's account as a whole, as it clarifies and confirms that he wants my interpretation of his words to be as close as possible to his own experience.

Although Athlete 2 was an individual athlete, he was also part of the national team. When he talks about the coach's most important role within the team, it becomes clear that he has greater expectations than Athlete 1 of the coach being involved in training and performance development:

[The coach's most important task in a team] is to lay the master plan, the one that controls the team [pause] … um … to some extent, but without a leader in the group the coach does not really stand a chance, because he does not actually do the training sessions. When you are out training, building up the team spirit, if you do not have someone who is willing to lead the team, a captain if you like, then the team falls apart.

The expectation that coaches should develop the master plan also encompasses an expectation of a closer relationship with them, because you're letting them in and giving them the opportunity to influence the training itself and the decisions that are made with respect to training. Nevertheless, the coach is dependent on the athletes choosing to follow the coach's master plan when they are out training. In other words, the athletes have the freedom and power to decide whether or not they will allow the coach to perform what Athlete 2 considers to be the coach's most important task. It is interesting to look at the significant amount of power that Athlete 2 realised he wielded over the coach, and at the consequences of him choosing to exercise that power:

And then I had Coach 6 as my coach, who was someone I did not have confidence in as a coach, but as I said to him on the first day, 'I do not really have confidence in you as a coach, but I believe we are going to work together.

Here Athlete 2 explains that he was confident that he and the coach would work together, but in practice

it turned out differently because he, and the other athletes in the team, did not have any confidence in this coach's master plan:

Q: How was the team affected when you changed coaches?
A: Generally, or … yes, generally positively, but with Coach 6 it did not work out, and suddenly the team was all over the shop with different opinions and different training philosophies.
Q: What were the consequences of that?
A: Well, the results were not too bad, but we had to change coach again the following year, so not everyone fits in as a coach.

Athlete 2 thus prejudged the coach before he has even started in the job. The coach did not satisfy any of the athlete's criteria for a good coach, and consequently there was no basis for a relationship. Athlete 2 rejected the coach and gave him no possibility to take part in his development. Viewed from the outside this may appear ruthless, but from Athlete 2's point of view this ruthlessness is a legitimate part of the quest for world-class performances and results. At the same time, it is worth noting the differences between Athlete 1 and Athlete 2 in this context. Athlete 1 had no expectation of the coach contributing to his training programme, and he simply did not want the coach to have any involvement in it at all. That attitude also protected him against any strife and a boycott of the coach of the kind described by Athlete 2. Athlete 2, meanwhile, did expect the coach to contribute to his training activities. He had strong opinions about what the right choices were to maximise performance development and what characteristics a good coach should have, and as we have seen the coach had to live up to those expectations from the beginning for the athlete to allow the coach to have any influence over him. For Athlete 2 it is impossible for a coach to build up trust, as it must be there from the start. However, it turns out that even if Athlete 2 initially had confidence in a coach, he

regularly reassessed whether the coach was still living up to his expectations and requirements, and if he found that the coach was no longer contributing in a way that he considered optimal, it became a source of conflict and led to a deterioration in the quality of their relationship:

I felt that the coaching role of Coach 3 had been diluted over the past year, and I took action, kind of explained what was behind the problem, how shall I put it … he said he felt the chemistry was not right and that it had not been right for perhaps two months […] and he asked me what was wrong, and I was totally prepared for that and I decided to have it out. Maybe it was unfair not to give him a second chance, but I did not […]. I had written down all of the things that I was unhappy with and what my conclusion was, which Coach 3 took really personally and very much as a personal attack, even though I said you're the best organiser for the team, but as a coach I think you're doing a really lousy job, and I need more … more feedback. We had a meeting at [location] after that, where he said he was not particularly pleased with the way I had handled things.

A diluted coaching role means that the coach is no longer living up to Athlete 2's expectations. However, he did not raise the issue when he started to notice it. Instead, he waited for the coach to realise it and raise it with him. This appears to suggest that Athlete 2 had an expectation that the coach would himself realise that he was no longer performing his job in a satisfactory manner. This required the coach to be aware of Athlete 2's expectations of him, which Athlete 2 appears to take for granted that he was. When the coach eventually realised that something was wrong and raised the matter with Athlete 2, in many ways it was too late. Athlete 2 was well-prepared, and he says that he had it out with the coach. He wanted to tell the coach, once and for all, that he was not doing a good enough job. He

had reached his conclusion before the meeting and he explains quite openly that he did not give the coach an opportunity to make any changes in response to the feedback given. Athlete 2 was ruthless when the coach no longer met his requirements and expectations. By then he no longer had any confidence in the coach, which meant there was no reason to maintain their relationship. In fact, when asked whether he would do the same thing again, he responds "I would do it again and maybe I should have done it even earlier", which shows clearly that he is still convinced that he handled the situation in the correct and best possible way. There is no self-criticism for the uncompromising way he chose to handle the situation and the coach.

By using IPA as the qualitative approach we have in our study gained an insider perspective of the unique relationships found in an environment at the absolute highest level in sport, investigating the coach-athlete relationship from the perspective of two super-elites.

Discussion

The overall findings in the emergent themes; 1) Extreme independence 2) Coaching without skills? 3) The coach as a butler 4) Expectations – make it or break it, indicate that these two super-elite athletes were extremely dedicated to their sport, they had a very clear opinion about what was required for them to maintain their success, and they were willing to do whatever was needed of them to "stay true" to their convictions. These findings are in accordance with the findings of Hardy et al. (2017) which indicated that super-elite athletes place the relative importance of their sport and their need to succeed over other aspects of life. However, in the current study, as the aim was to explore the dynamics and complexities within the coach-athlete relationship, our findings also illuminate how the specific characteristics of super-elite athletes might affect the relationship dynamics between the athlete and the coach at this level of sport. For instance, the participants' assessments of their coaches' abilities were

based on their convictions about what was the best and right thing to do. Their convictions about what was the best and right thing to do also served as an essential motivator to include or distance themselves from their coach to maintain relationship dynamics that provided them control over the decisions and choices made within the relationship. Together, these findings give a picture of the key underlying dynamics that affected the two athletes' perceptions of what was the hallmark of an effective coach-athlete relationship. Their actions towards their coaches also appeared to arise from their need to maintain their subjectively perceived degree of control. Having a high level of perceived control has been shown to be a key factor in relation to experiencing and coping with stress (Edwards & Hardy, 1996; Ursin, 1988). Since elite athletes consider their coach to be a potential key stress factor, it makes sense to discuss our findings in relation to relevant research on stress and coping mechanisms. This will shed light on whether the participants' accounts and stories can be considered descriptions of coping strategies designed to manage their coach as a stress factor and on how coping strategies aimed at reducing stress also constitute part of the underlying dynamics that influence their relationships with their coaches.

Coping strategies

Athletes in elite sport must continuously appraise a wide range of potential stressors known to influence both their performance and well-being (Fletcher, Hanton, & Wagstaff, 2012) Also, early research helped to elucidate that in the case of elite athletes, a high degree of perceived control is an important factor in relation to both the experience and ability to cope with stress (Edwards & Hardy, 1996; Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998). Our study, indeed, also found control and actions taken to maintain a high level of perceived control to be particularly important. A recurring theme in the athletes' stories was that what mattered was their personal goal achievement and level of performance,

and that their choices and actions were largely designed to maintain as much control as possible. This applied to everything from their definition of elite sport and the attributes of an elite athlete through to the extent to which they were willing to allow their coach to influence them and what they required and expected of their coach. Interestingly, it has been shown earlier that elite athletes who experience their coach as a major stressor also report a resulting lack of control and dissatisfaction with their performance (Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998). Thus, it make sense that athletes who have reached a superior level will try to be in charge of their situation, as much as they can, including their defined relationship with their coach.

Contemporary research focusing on stress and coping in sport has typically used Lazarus and Folkman (1984) transactional conceptualization of stress (Miles, Neil, & Barker, 2016). Based on this conceptualization, stress is considered as an ongoing transaction between the stressors that emanate from the given environment and the resources of the person operating within it, with the process of cognitive appraisal and coping strategies important to how the individual responds to transactions (Arnold, Fletcher, & Daniels, 2017; Miles et al., 2016) The informants in our study had performed at a world-class level over an extended period of time, they had also undergone a long learning process in terms of understanding what created stress for them and how to manage it in order to maintain as much control as possible. Although previous studies have shown that viewing your coach as a stressor is associated with a low degree of control and dissatisfaction with performances, in this study it appears that all of the choices and actions of the athletes are governed by how they defined the following areas: elite sport as a context with its requirements for continuous goal achievement and performance development; themselves as elite athletes; the role of the coach; and the characteristics of a good relationship dynamic. Over time, it seems that they learned to manage their coach as a stressor, and their definition of having a good relationship and

an appropriate relationship dynamic with one's coach is based on their experiences of how they were able to maintain as much control as possible over a key stressor with the potential to threaten their struggle to achieve their personal goals, and thereby maximise their chances of enduring satisfaction with their own performances.

Obviously more research is required, but it would be interesting to investigate further whether the way in which super-elite athletes define their context, their expectations of themselves and their coaches, and the nature of a good relationship and an effective relationship dynamic with their coach, really is a form of learned coping strategy or mechanism designed to maintain as much control as possible and thereby maximise the chance of achieving personal goals and satisfying the rigorous demands of elite sport. Or put another way, the athletes' view of the context, themselves and their coach is, at least in part, based on and motivated by their belief that the athlete should be in control in the coach-athlete relationship. Having control is in many ways about having the power to make decisions.

Power

To explore the concept of power in coaching, several researchers have applied the concepts of Bourdieu (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2014; Purdy, Jones, & Cassidy, 2009). Pierre Bourdieu, one of the most respected sociologists of our time, is perhaps particularly well-known for his work on the concept of power, which has proved to provide a useful framework for research that aims to increase our understanding of how power works and operates in the context of sport (Cushion & Kitchen, 2011). Most research into power in the context of sport has viewed athletes as relatively passive actors who are primarily subjected to power (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2014; Johns & Johns, 2000; Jones, Glintmeyer, & McKenzie, 2005). That does not correspond with the findings of this study. The two

athletes in this study have demonstrated an ability to achieve excellent results in the most prestigious international competitions (Olympic Games and World championship) over an extended period, thereby proving that they can cope with the very high demands of this context, which is something that very few people manage, even within the world of elite sport. In other words, they belong to a very exclusive club, and that fact is likely to be a key contributing factor to why the balance of power in their relationships with their coaches was different from the one observed in most previous studies. However, Purdy et al. (2009) showed in their study on athletes' use of power in an elite men's rowing program that being the best athlete in the program gave a more advantageous position of power than the athletes who were not as good. Although the results in Purdy et al's (2009) study were not as clear as the data in this study, they still show the same tendency that performing at the highest level can provide power.

One of the crucial concepts in Bourdieu's theory of power is capital. Capital is the capacity you have to exercise power over your own and other people's future, and as such capital is a form of power (Jenkins, 2014; Ritzer, 1996). According to Bourdieu, society is structured on the basis of differences in the distribution of capital, and individuals are constantly striving to increase their own personal capital. The amount of capital an individual can accumulate have a significant impact when determining the choices available to that individual. Within sport, the differences in distribution of capital can be seen in the fact that coaching takes place within a hierarchical structure. The various forms of power – social, symbolic, cultural and physical – help to create a hierarchy that is both formal and informal and which encompasses both athletes and coaches. In their study of professional youth football, Cushion and Jones (2006) found that the amount of social capital held by each individual depended on their position in the team of coaches or group of athletes (e.g. head coach/assistant coach, professional athlete/young

athlete). Cultural capital was built up through experience and qualifications (e.g. understanding the cultural codes and language), and symbolic capital derived from fame, personal achievements and prestige. The overall amount of capital held determined the social hierarchy and structure at the club. Purdy and her colleagues (Purdy, Potrac, & Jones, 2008) also found it essential to make use of the concepts of social, physical and symbolic capital in order to create an appropriate theoretical framework for the claims and internal struggles within a high-performance environment. As a result, the existence and role of capital in a sporting context is receiving increasing attention (Cushion & Kitchen, 2011). As achieving results is the clear aim of elite sport, and the basis for the relationship between the coach and athlete at this level, it is probably also the case that good results at super-elite level are the biggest contributor to accumulating all of the forms of power, as they represent an objective proof of success in an extremely demanding and goal-oriented context.

Using Bourdieu's definition of capital, it is clear that these athletes possessed more of the right kinds of capital, as their accounts reveal that they controlled their own futures, and those of their coaches, since they had the ultimate power to define and decide how close an involvement their coaches were allowed with the areas that had a direct impact on their performance development. As super-elite athletes, they had accumulated sufficient capital to be able to exercise the power to define the nature of both their own role and that of their coaches. They defined themselves and their own role by describing Norwegian super-elite athletes as independent-minded people who are their own coaches, for example. Meanwhile, they expressed a general lack of confidence in the abilities of coaches, saying that it is wrong for the coach to be the boss, and defining the role of coach as a purely practical coordinating function. These kinds of descriptions and views of themselves and their relationship partners are likely to have played a key role in setting the premises

for how their relationships worked in practice and which party had the ultimate power of definition.

The way in which the athletes manoeuvred and made use of inclusion and exclusion is also indicative of how they exercised their power and of what they believed were the right choices and actions to maintain and further increase their own power, both in the context as a whole and in their relationships with their coaches. Maintaining their performance level and thus achieving objectively good results was how they protected the capital that kept the balance of power in their favour in their relationships with their coaches.

The egalitarian culture in Scandinavia and its value of low power distance might also have been a contributing factor to the participants' ability to accumulate their specific power position. However, more research is required to investigate this aspect further.

Conclusion

In our study, research related to coping strategies and power provided sound theoretical explanatory frameworks for these athletes' stories. Still, we do not claim that we have the gold standard or the truth about the underlying psychological mechanisms in the coach-athlete relationship for super-elite athletes. The foundations of IPA is its dedication to the individual's unique experiences. The focus of research using IPA is quality in terms of emphasizing details to capture the complexities and richness in each participant's personal story. Thus, the purpose of our study, through the use of IPA, was to commit ourselves to investigate in detail the lived experiences of our participants and to take their perspectives seriously. Because of its idiographic dedication, IPA studies often have a small number of participants. This is considered to be a value in itself as it provides an opportunity to get insight into the important meaning of each case (Smith, 2004).

Being part of an elite sport context that is characterized by very high performance requirements,

demands high quality deliveries of everyone involved. According to Jowett (2017) relationship quality within the coach-athlete relationship is of vital importance for successful outcomes. As a sport psychologist one will in many cases be a key support provider to both athletes and coaches when improvement of relationship quality is the purpose. The findings of this study can contribute to increased insight into the importance of underlying psychological mechanisms for athletes' perception of what constitute an effective relationship with their coach. This kind of knowledge can be very useful to further increase sport psychologists' understanding of the complexity that operate within the coach-athlete relationship at the world class level, and what might be suitable practical initiatives to enhance relationship quality.

Given that super-elite athletes have small but crucial differences compared to elite athletes (Hardy et al., 2017) and that elite sport is a context where small nuances and differences can have significant impact on the athletes' performance (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002), getting more detailed information from super-elite athletes, and also their coaches, can further increase our understanding and insight into the complexities within the coach-athlete relationship. Central to this matter may be the distinctive character and culture of the specific sport and the society, the number of days which the coach and the athlete travel together in the course of a year, athletes in individual sports versus athletes in team sports, as well as how dependent the athlete is on his/her coach to ensure high quality training on daily basis.

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Paper III

Frøyen, A. F., Pensgaard, A. M., & Gustafsson, H. Making athletes feel safe and secure: An IPA of two serial winning coaches, (manuscript).

Making athletes feel safe and secure: An IPA of two serial winning coaches

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the interpersonal knowledge of two Serial Winning Coaches (SWC's) in world-class sport, and how they used their expertise in this field to build a collaborative partnership with their athletes. With the use of semi-structured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), we found four super-ordinate themes to present the results; 1) The coach's role and interpersonal relations in the demanding world of elite-sport, 2) The importance of safety and the coach's role in providing it, 3) Safety and trust as prerequisites for high performance, and 4) Flexible communication - the driving force in the relationship. Overall, the analysis revealed that the basic premise for the coaches' interactions with the athletes was a recognition that their perspective on the situation did not represent the only reality or correct answer. Having a high-quality relationship was, in many ways, the best tool for minimizing unwanted disruptions and risks in a context that is marked by uncertainty. The super-ordinate themes are further discussed with the use of the theoretical frameworks of psychological safety and trust, with the argument that these concepts represent essential perspectives in the discussion of the relevance of coaches' interpersonal knowledge in world-class sport.

Key words: coach-athlete relationship, relationship quality, elite sport, interpersonal knowledge, coaching, psychological safety

Introduction

The performance environment of world-class sports is an ever-changing environment characterized as being both unpredictable and complex (Purdy & Jones, 2011), and coaches at this level face steadily increasing challenges to succeed in their daily practice (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Coaching effectiveness is, according to Côté and Gilbert (2009), dependent on a combination of factors: the coaches' knowledge; athletes' outcomes; and the coaching context. The knowledge component of coaching effectiveness is the coaches' personal experiences, strategies, and behaviours, which are needed to efficiently and successfully meet the numerous demands of their profession. Three forms of knowledge constitute the basis of coaching effectiveness and expertise: professional knowledge; interpersonal knowledge; and intrapersonal knowledge (Gilbert & Côté, 2013). Professional knowledge concerns the coach's expert knowledge and ability to teach sport-specific skills, while interpersonal knowledge is the coach's ability to interact with other people and maintain relationships. Intrapersonal knowledge captures the coach's ability to use self-awareness and reflection as a means to learn. The purpose of this study was not to investigate or discuss all three knowledge components but to explore in-depth the interpersonal knowledge of two Serial Winning Coaches (SWCs) in world-class sport. To qualify as a SWC, two criteria must be met: *a) they have won multiple championships at the Olympics, World Championships, and/or in highly recognized professional leagues; and b) they have done so with multiple teams or individual athletes over a prolonged period of time"*(Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016, p. 221). In a study intended to examine career development for SWCs, and the hallmark of their daily practice with their world-class athletes seen from the perspective of both coaches and athletes (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016), the results revealed that when these athletes elaborated on the uniqueness of a SWC compared to coaches at lower levels they especially

emphasized their interpersonal skills. The SWC had a unique ability to show flexibility and adapt to meet the needs of individuals, situations, or contexts, as they had a particular ability to understand the impact of their actions on others. The SWCs also had a keen awareness of both their own feelings and those of others. Several of the athletes also highlighted the SWC's unique ability to create an environment characterized by dialogue as a form of conversation, where the athletes' initiative and creativity was encouraged. Based on their results, Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) suggested that the coaching and relational interaction of world-leading performance teams will increasingly become a collaborative partnership rather than the coach holding a particularly dominant position compared to the athletes. In fact, the athletes in their study emphasized that an important step towards further developing coaching is for coaches to invest even more time and resources in getting to know their athletes as individuals and not just as athletes.

In line with these results and suggestions, the purpose of this study was to gain more in-depth knowledge about the coach-athlete relationship as a collaborative partnership seen from the perspective of two SWCs, and about how they through their daily practice and interactions with their athletes managed to create an environment characterized by collaboration, dialogue, trust and respect as a basic relational condition for high-level performance in world-class sport.

Coinciding with the argument put forward by Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) about the importance of obtaining more insight into the individual stories of SWCs as a significant contribution to an empirical evidence base for this unique group of coaches, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative method with a strong idiographic approach and emphasis on personal meaning making (Smith, 2011), and was thus chosen as the methodology for this study.

Method

IPA is a qualitative methodology with its theoretical foundation in idiography, phenomenology and hermeneutics (Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2007). The overall purpose of research using IPA is to provide unique insight into personal meaning making grounded in its theoretical foundations through a commitment to the detailed analysis of the participants' experiences and how an experiential phenomenon has been interpreted by a specific group in a specific context, while there is a recognition that gaining access to these personal experiences is only possible through the researcher's process of interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2007). IPA's commitment to the specifics is also the main reason why a small number of purposefully sampled participants is encouraged, and thus considered a value in itself (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

During the process of analysis it is important that the researcher is fully focused on the lived experiences of the participant, and tries not to be influenced by his/her preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation. To ensure this in this particular study the first author, who conducted the analysis, had to articulate and clarify her preconceptions on the topic before starting the analysis. This kind of bracketing represents the starting point of the hermeneutical circle. Throughout the process of analysis the analyst is working within a hermeneutical circle by continuously shifting focus between the part and the whole at different levels of the participant's story (Smith et al., 2009). In addition to this, the researcher also alternates between the participant's story and his/her interpretation of the account and its meaning. This results in a double hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2009).

Participants

The study had received ethical approval from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). Subsequently, an invitation to take part in the study, an information letter and

an informed consent form was sent to the participants. The participants in this study were two

SWCs, one male who was a coach in an individual sport and one female who was a coach in a

team sport. They were both strategically selected for the purpose of this study (Smith et al.,

2009) as they fulfilled the criteria for a SWC, having coached athletes who have won several

gold medals at the Olympic Games and at world championships, in addition to several gold

medals in other major championships. They were professional, full-time coaches during their

careers, but had retired when the interviews took place.

Procedure

The invitation letter to take part in the study emphasized that participation in the study

was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without having to

give any reason. It was also stressed that the data would be treated as strictly confidential, but

because of their records as coaches, there was still a possibility that they could be identified

indirectly. Publication would therefore only be done with their permission, which both

coaches did give. Nevertheless, for the sake of confidentiality, their names have been replaced

with Coach 1 and Coach 2. The data was collected with the use of semi-structured interviews

conducted by the first author. As the study was part of a larger project, the interviews were

quite long, lasting two hours.

The questions related to this study centred on the coaches' views, experiences and

feelings about the coach-athlete relationship, and how they went about creating the desired

relationship with their athletes. As the aim of the interviews was to let the participants tell

their stories, it was important that the wording of the questions set the stage for this.

Questions asked included: What constitutes a good coach-athlete relationship for you? Can

you describe your relationship with your athletes? How did you go about building

relationships with your athletes? What did you consider to be the most important part of your

job as the head coach? As it was very important for us to bracket out our preconceptions about

the coach-athlete relationship, every effort was made to ensure that the interviews focused on the participants' views and assessments of the relationship.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the first author. The analysis of the cases mainly followed the steps described in (Smith et al., 2009). First, the transcript was read numerous times to become familiar with the participant's story. Subsequently an in-depth textual analysis took place focusing on the participant's thoughts and experiences related to the coach-athlete relationship. At this point in the analysis the main aim is to produce thorough comments on, and annotations to, the data (Smith & Osborn, 2003). These exploratory notes capture the phenomenological perspective of IPA, as the focus of the analysis is on the participant's statements and how he/she attached meanings to these experiences (Smith et al., 2009). These comprehensive notes provided the foundation for the next step: identifying emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009). Identifying emergent themes involved a dual focus in terms of both focusing on the various parts of the transcript, while also keeping an overview of the whole picture provided by the initial annotations. The dual focus that took place at this point in the analysis illustrates how the analyst is moving within the hermeneutical circle as the parts of the analysis that have previously been treated as a whole are split into several parts, before being reconstructed to a new whole before the completion and presentation of the results (Smith et al., 2009). The whole process of analysis was repeated for both cases.

Results

During their careers as national coaches, both Coach 1 and Coach 2 were responsible for world-class athletes. They both took over national teams with a mix of athletes who had performed at the highest level for an extended period and younger athletes in the early parts of

what would turn out to be long careers as world-class athletes. They had also both played key roles for the teams before taking over the top job, as well as previously having been coaches at a lower level. In other words, both Coach 1 and Coach 2 were people who were very familiar with both the peculiarities of sport in general, and with the existing high-performance culture in the national team in particular. As national coaches, they had overall responsibility for leading a pre-existing high-performance culture with clearly established requirements based on both the context and the athletes. This sporting and contextual understanding and insight provided a platform that informed how they chose to act in their roles as national coaches and what they considered most important in their interaction with both individual athletes and their teams as a whole. One factor that may have influenced their views and what they felt was central to their personal interaction with their athletes and the team as a whole is that Coach 1 was the national coach of a team consisting of athletes in an individual sport, whereas Coach 2 was the national coach for a team sport.

Although these coaches each have a unique story to tell, their experiences can be grouped in four superordinate themes: 1) their view of the coach's role and personal interaction in the highly demanding environment of world class sport; 2) the importance of feeling safe and the coach's role in providing it; 3) safety and trust as prerequisites for high performance; and 4) their ability to be flexible in their communication with athletes as an important driver of relationship quality.

The coach's role and interpersonal relations in the demanding world of elite sport

Coach 1's view of his role was shaped by the overall responsibility he had for facilitating for the athletes, and the need for this to be done to a very high standard. This can be clearly seen in his description of the difference between elite sport and sport at lower levels:

> There is this demand for you to be a facilitator, and for everything, not just training but everything around it, to be 100 percent right […] plus the fact that you are working with adults, so the coach-athlete relationship changes a bit from earlier, when it was more top-down, [at the world-class level] you become more of a collaborative partner than a pure coach, at least that is how I interpreted my role as coach, that we were working as a team to achieve something […]. That may be the biggest difference, and then the high demands on everything you do; that is the key to getting results.

In addition to his role in facilitating the right conditions for the athletes' development and performances, he also believed that in elite sport there was less of a hierarchy in the relationship between him as a coach (and also the other coaches) and the athletes, and that they were all part of a team that was trying to achieve something together. This may partly be because athletes at this level possess a vast amount of knowledge about and insight into sport from the point of view of an athlete, which the coach does not necessarily have. The coach, meanwhile, possesses a different kind of knowledge and insight from the athletes, but at an equally high level, and it is only through personal interaction based on mutual respect and cooperation that they can together satisfy the demands of elite sport and achieve world-class performances.

Coach 2 did not feel that there was a huge difference between coaching elite athletes and athletes at lower levels during actual training sessions. In that context it was always about developing potential:

> During the actual training sessions I do not think there is any difference. Then I am looking at individual players, and at what the players can manage to do together. Obviously there is a difference in what they can and cannot manage to do, but the

work itself is exciting anyway […]. It is absolutely vital not to interpret everything

you see, or other people, based on just your own experiences, because then you will

have a very narrow outlook. You must be open-minded and take individuals seriously

so that you do not start making assumptions based on your own beliefs, and instead

find out what is actually going on.

For Coach 2 it was all about development, regardless of the performance level, and

how she as a coach could help individuals to realise their potential. Based on what she says,

this appears to have been her main motivation as a coach. At the same time, she strongly

believed that assessing a situation purely on the basis of your own scope of understanding was

insufficient if you wanted to make the best possible contribution to the athletes' development.

Implicit in this is an awareness that there are several ways of interpreting and experiencing the

exact same situation, and that as a coach she needed and had a responsibility to draw on other

perspectives, since they could help her to adapt the style and content of her communication

and interaction in order to optimise the development of each individual and of the team as a

whole. In other words, Coach 2 also stressed the quality of the relationship between the coach

and athlete as a key factor in ensuring the highest possible standard of cooperation on training

and development.

As well as having a clear understanding of the contextual requirements and team

goals, and his role in achieving them, Coach 1 also had very clear views on the mental skills

that singled out the best athletes when they were given the perfect conditions to develop and

perform:

[…] our very best athletes have all been really similar in terms of their focus, their

concentration. They focus on what they have to do, whereas the second best ones often

get distracted by all of the things around them, like why are we training here and [another country's team] is there, whereas the best ones know that there is no point in wasting energy on things they cannot change, so they put all their energy into doing what they need to do to become the best in the world. So the very best athletes are really good at this, and you constantly try to work on it with the ones just below them, and the role of the coach is to organise the programme and everything as much as possible, precisely to enable them to achieve that focus, the right focus and concentration, and help them to not think about other stuff, because you have thought about it for them.

The key to being this kind of facilitator was that the coach had to act in such a way that the athletes could see and experience that he was doing what was needed to create the perfect conditions for their development. It was through his actions that he could demonstrate to the athletes that he understood his role, and that he was doing everything in his power to meet their demands with respect to the role of a national coach. In order to facilitate everything down to the last detail, as well as performing specific actions he also had to get to know each individual's perspective and situation, so that he could understand what was needed to give the athletes the best possible conditions for improving their performances. This ability to recognise and understand different perspectives enabled the coach to choose a course of action that the athletes would be in agreement with. In many ways, the athlete behaviour that he describes as optimal for development and/or performance can be seen as the incarnation of the quality of the work being done by the team for each individual athlete, but also for the team as a whole.

The importance of safety and the coach's role in providing it

On the one hand, Coach 1's role as a facilitator was to take the specific actions that would allow the athletes to focus fully on what they needed to do. On the other hand, this facilitation also played an important role in building up trust and making the athletes feel safe. This was clear from his description of how he worked in the early phase of his career as national coach:

> When I joined the National team I approached the role with great humility, and just worked incredibly hard as a way of building up trust, so the athletes would think 'here is someone who is working for us', and then gradually you develop the authority that enables you to be the place where the team finds safety and people start listening to you. So I slid really gently into the coaching role – at first my actions spoke louder than words – and then when you feel safe and everyone is pulling in the same direction as you, they start listening to you.

Wanting to be the source of safety for the team was about more than just the importance of the athletes feeling safe enough to focus on improving their own performances. Wanting to personify other people's feelings of safety is an indication of the responsibility he felt for creating optimal conditions for the whole team. It also says something about the type of relationship he wanted to have to the athletes and how important he wanted to be to them. He wanted to be the person the athletes trusted most, and the one they listened to and went to if they felt any insecurity that was interfering with their focus on improving. As he was the centre point that *everyone* gravitated towards, everyone also pulled in the same direction towards the same goal. This was necessary in order to create a sense of community, of team spirit, a feeling of "we" rather than "me". Catering to the needs of the individuals, as well as those of the team as a whole, was a constant balancing act in response to the situations that

arose. Bearing in mind Coach 1's description of himself as the place where the team found safety, and the behavioural response of the athletes to this, it is easy to imagine that if the athletes had felt insecure they would have stopped listening to their coach, and implicitly to other people as well. They would then have gone their own independent ways, sowing division rather than building team spirit. This would have upset the balance between the team and the individual, with the needs of the individual dominating and the sense of the team as a community being lost. For Coach 1 this was highly undesirable, so he went to great lengths to avoid it. The views described by Coach 1 here may also reflect a belief that individual athletes were more likely to perform well if they were part of the community that the national team represented, but also the knowledge that they could in fact choose to pursue their careers as independent athletes outside the national team.

Coach 2, on the other hand, had a different view of her role as the person the athletes went to and sought advice from in order to improve their performances:

I have never been a coach who wants to make the relationship with the players too personal; I had good relationships, but it was important to me for them to trust themselves […] I really wanted them to feel that they benefited from the coaches, but also to use what they got from us to improve themselves, so I did not take any offence whatsoever if any of them felt that they did not get everything they needed from me. It was great if they could get what they needed from [name of person] or from their club coach or from [name of person] at The top sport centre, so it just a case of 'What do you need now?'. Where can you get it?

Part of the reason that Coach 2 mainly focused on the athletes' development, and did not mind who contributed to it, could be that in a team sport there is only one national team.

The option of going it alone does not exist. That does not mean Coach 2 did not try to perform her work as national coach to a high standard in order to play a significant role in the athletes' development, but rather she recognised that the team was more important than her as a person, and that if the athletes performed better by listening to other people, that was a good thing, as the team and its performances would reap the benefits. It is also worth noting that this statement could be seen as a defence mechanism that she used in cases where she was unable to ensure that the athlete developed the necessary self-belief through her personal interactions with that person. If many of the athletes had gone to someone else for help with their development rather than to her as the national coach, it is likely that this would have influenced her perception of how good she was at her job.

For Coach 1 it was important to be the common safety factor and to enjoy a high level of trust amongst the team members. This may precisely be because he considered trust and safety to be the key components for high performance, so they guided his actions and the way in which he managed to balance individual needs against the needs of the team as a whole.

> I am sure that feeling safe results in good performances ninety percent of the time; if the athlete feels safe – in themselves, their surroundings and the people around them – and that everything is being looked after, they can concentrate on their performance.

In other words, it was about perceived safety with respect to all of the factors that could affect performance, and the coach could see that the athletes felt safe if they did not ask what he called unnecessary questions, in other words questions that were not directly related to the overall goal of optimising their performances. For Coach 1, it was a sign of feeling safe if the athletes "took for granted" that the coaches were carrying out their tasks to the expected standard. Part of the reason why this kind of trust was so important to Coach 1 may be that he

was a coach in a high-risk sport where it was absolutely vital for athletes to only focus on the things that were important to performing well and dealing with the sport's inherent risks, and for there to be no disturbances that might distract their attention.

For Coach 2 it was also important for the athletes to develop the necessary feeling of safety in the areas that could affect their performances:

> You must feel safe enough to be able to cope with insecurity, because there are inherent insecurities with respect to competition and your opposition. You build up that feeling of safety by focusing on the things you achieve, the things you are capable of and your qualities, and reinforcing them, and of course on what is important for us as a team. So that feeling of safety is also developed through a process of actively establishing the values of the team: how we want to be perceived; what is important to us here; what kind of relationships we want between us on and off the court; what constitutes good communication between the players; and what constitutes good communication between us in the coaching staff and the players. That is a continuous process in my experience.

It is the nature of sport feeling uncertainty and insecurity when you are actually competing, but what she is talking about here is ensuring safety in the areas that could affect the performance of the athletes in a competition situation and that are more possible to control. Coach 2 also stressed the need for, and importance of, the team feeling safe, both on and off the court, with communication and dialogue playing a key role in building up this sense of safety in the athletes. In other words, it was about having good enough relationships, based on communication, to help all of the athletes feel safe enough to focus entirely on

improving their performances, so that insecurities in relationships with other players and/or the coaching staff did not create distractions or lead to a loss of focus.

Safety and trust as prerequisites for high performance

The type of trust and safety described by Coach 1 took a long time to build up, according to him, because it was the foundation for the athletes daring to push the limits in a context where they were already world-leading, and where doing so involved risks to the individual athlete:

> In order to win and become as good as possible, you need to do things differently from other people, and the more everything is facilitated for them, the more they can fully concentrate on that, so you have you spend loads of time on that [facilitation] […]. They have to put incredible [stressed] trust in you if they are to do the small things that other people do not do and go even further, so feeling safe in the coach-athlete relationship in [the sport in question] is extremely [stressed] important.

In this statement, Coach 1 sets out the type of safety that was vital to performance, and it becomes clear that fundamentally it is about feeling safe in the relationship between the coach and the athlete. In other words, the prerequisite for high performance was feeling sufficiently safe in the relationship for the parties to be able to focus fully on what was directly related to development and performance. Here it is important to point out that Coach 1 was one side of a coach-athlete relationship with all of the athletes in the team. All of the athletes had different personalities and different levels of need to feel safe in order to focus on their development and performances. This required Coach 1 to have a good understanding of people, with the ability to see different perspectives, feel empathy and show flexibility, as

well as to adapt both his communication and actions to the person and the situation, in order to build up and maintain safety and trust.

Coach 2 also stressed that her ability to see different perspectives and empathise with athletes were cornerstones of what she considered to be her coaching role and of her way of providing the athletes and team with the best possible conditions for development and performance. At the same time, she was open about the fact that it took time for her to realise how important it was to see situations from the athletes' perspectives in order to develop high quality coach-athlete relationships:

> With some athletes you just have *that* chemistry immediately. Others are [pause] … to begin with, when I was not getting through, or I felt that I was not getting a proper hearing or any response or contact, I was a bit impatient, and no doubt childish. I just said 'OK, that is tough for her', but it was not really tough for her, it just me not doing a good enough job, and when I recognised that and became more curious about how I could establish contact, then I started working really hard on that area and became much more patient about doing it. With some players I think it must have taken three, four or even five years *before* I really felt that now they trust me or trust themselves […]. I have definitely realised that you cannot leave any stone unturned, which is exciting, I think, and I would look at who in my coaching staff could try to get through if I did not succeed so that we did not just give up. You really do not want to give up on a player when you see that someone has not fulfilled their potential, that is exciting.

For Coach 2, establishing contact with an athlete involved much more than just chatting together. As a coach, she spent many years patiently and inquisitively building up the relationships she wanted, which meant feeling that the athletes trusted her as a person and

coach, and by definition this hinged on the nature of the communication and interaction between her as a coach and the individual athlete. For Coach 2 this was based on a genuine belief in her athletes and their ability to develop, and also a recognition that high-quality meaningful interaction is vital to the ability of athletes to fulfil their potential.

Coach 1's account leaves little doubt about his belief that feeling safe was an important prerequisite for developing as an athlete, and that feeling safe in the relationship between the coach and athlete was the decisive factor. At the same time, ensuring that each individual athlete and the team as a whole felt safe was the biggest challenge of being a coach, according to Coach 1:

> Obviously you are never going to have a totally homogeneous group of athletes, so the biggest challenge of being a coach is maintaining team spirit at the same time as making adaptations to individual needs so that everyone can develop. And for me it is important to achieve that in order to make a team feel safe, because that is what is needed for the team to perform well. So really managing to adapt to individual needs at the same time as getting everyone to stick to the team rules, that is the biggest challenge really.

In other words, to make the team feel safe, he as the coach had to maintain a balance between adapting to individual needs and preserving a team spirit through all of the athletes adhering to the team rules. For Coach 1, this was the most important thing to achieve, but also the greatest challenge. This suggests that it was the inherent complexity of this process that made it difficult. The fact that Coach 2 said she could use three, four or five years to build up what she considered to be the necessary contact with the athletes also bears witness to the challenging and highly complex nature of this process. This may partly be because it involved

constantly alternating between focusing on the team as a whole and on the situations arising that might affect the team, and focusing in detail on individual athletes and/or each individual coach-athlete relationship and the situations that might affect the individual and/or that relationship. Coach 1 also made it clear that his assessment of where the balance lay between meeting individual needs and safeguarding the interests of the team and maintaining team spirit was situation-dependent and constantly subject to review. This was clear from his description of how the atmosphere in the team changed depending on the stage of the season and how the athletes were performing in competitions:

> That is a very good question, because during a season it is quite strange how things develop, because when you start pre-season in [time of the year], the mood is really relaxed the whole time. When you get close to the start of the season, the atmosphere in the team gets a bit more tense, and then of course some people perform and others do not, which can lead to difficult situations if one person has won an Olympic gold medal and someone else is sitting in their room crying, desperately disappointed. It is just really difficult to deal with that there and then, because some people perform and others do not […]. It is very easy just to focus on the guy who has done best, and forget about the rest, but they are probably the ones who need you most.

Coach 1's description of how the mood in the team constantly changed over the course of the year depending on where you were in the in-season/out-of-season cycle, and of how this affected the team, once again highlights the very dynamic nature of Coach 1's coaching experience. When describing the changes in the team's mood, he used words like relaxed and more tense. This can be seen as a description of the changes in the tension levels in the athletes/team, which naturally rose as the competitive season approached. At the same time,

this description and choice of words may reflect how the requirements with respect to personal relationships and Coach 1's responsibilities altered and became more challenging when the atmosphere became more tense.

In the case of Coach 2, it was not so much the changes in the atmosphere over the course of a season that shed most light on the importance of high-quality coach-athlete relationships for player development. Rather, it came out in her description of the most important job of the coach. However, what she considered to be the coach's most important job did vary through the season:

> My experience is that it [the coach's most important job] will vary a bit according to where you are in the cycle. If you have just finished a season or a championship, your most important job is to properly analyse where we are, where we have got to, and is there any potential for development, for improvement. Then you can develop a joint understanding, which provides a good platform and foundation for the next cycle. So that is the most important job at that point. And then you get to the next phase, where you have to motivate the team to work harder and improve, and set subsidiary goals along the way, and of course bring in the necessary expertise. One big responsibility is knowing your own limitations and strengths, so that you can bring in people with qualities who complement that. And in that process you have to be pretty close and on the case, so that people have a good time and feel motivated, because it is pretty demanding. As a coach you have to see the whole person, who is not *just* a [athlete in the sport in question]; they are a complete person, and you have to show interest in all of their sides."

By having high-quality relationships with her athletes, which involved building up sufficient trust within the relationships, Coach 2 was able to get to know the athletes as individuals, and thus create a safe framework in which they could express what they needed in order to have the perfect conditions for a demanding development process, particularly when they were entering a new cycle. That development phase was when the athletes needed to push their limits, put in more effort and raise their level, which was very demanding for athletes who were already performing at a really high level. During this period it was essential for the athletes to have sufficient belief in themselves and in their abilities for them to dare to push themselves even further, and it was precisely this sense of safety that Coach 2 wanted to develop in the athletes through the personal interaction she managed to establish and develop with each individual person. The importance of instilling this feeling of safety in the individual players and the team may also be part of the reason that she as a coach was also so adamant that if she failed to instil this feeling in some players, it was important to give other people the chance to do so. Recognising both her own strengths and weaknesses, and the vital importance of feeling safe to the team's performance, she prioritised the performance of the individual players and the team above everything else. Coach 1's interpersonal skills were also apparent from his description of, and recognition of, the fact that it was easiest to interact with the athletes who had performed best, but that it was nevertheless more important to support those who had not lived up to their own expectations, even if it could be more challenging. Mastering the kind of interpersonal skills referred to in Coach 1's description does not just require awareness and empathy, but also the willingness and courage to meet and interact with athletes who are dealing with negative feelings. Coach 2's comments also stress the importance of mastering interpersonal skills such as awareness and empathy in a high-performance environment. She was convinced of the value of feeling empathy for her athletes, and believed that caring about each individual as a whole person was the key to

creating an optimal environment for the development of the athletes. The effort and patience she put into gaining the trust of the athletes is also evidence of how important she perceived this to be with respect to performance. She was willing to work systematically with certain athletes for years on end in order to ensure that had sufficient trust in her, and in themselves, to feel confident about their development. Equally, she was humble enough to recognise that her personal interaction with some of the athletes did not succeed in building up sufficient trust and safety, in which case she was very happy for someone else to step in.

As head coaches in an elite sport context and with coaching philosophies that saw the quality of the coach-athlete relationship as fundamental to improving the athletes' performances, it is natural that they did everything in their power to maintain high quality relationships with everyone. In view of their goal of making individual athletes and the team the best in the world, they simply could not "afford" any low-quality coach-athlete relationship within the team – and as coaches they were ultimately responsible for the quality of those relationships. If people did not feel safe in any of these relationships it would have a negative impact on the whole project to achieve world class performance, as increasingly high sporting standards were mirrored by a need for high-quality coach-athlete relationships, and this quality was maintained by continuously focusing on it whatever the circumstances.

Flexible communication – the driving force in the relationship

So what are the key elements of a good relationship between a coach and an athlete according to Coach 1?

> That they [coach and athlete] have in a way learnt to communicate with one another at the right level, that they have found the right wavelength for communicating, because that is different for each athlete in their relationship with the coach. I communicate differently with athlete x than I do with athlete y when talking to them alone, because

people are different, so you have to find the right level or way of talking, try to learn what will work best in terms of getting both of you to perform well. In a way, as a coach you have think, for each athlete, 'what are we going to do to maximise your performance, and what about yours?', so it is about managing not to be monotonous in your leadership style, but rather adapting yourself as well […], managing to work out how to talk with each individual in order to build a relationship. The best kind of relationship is one where you feel secure, where there is mutual respect, and where you have very clear expectations of each other. The athlete knows what is expected of them and I know what is expected of me, there is not any doubt. If that is the case, I think that is a reflection of a very good coach-athlete relationship.

For a coach and athlete to help each other become the best in the world, you both need to be good at communicating your expectations really clearly.

Here it is important to note that Coach 1 emphasised that he had a unique coach-athlete relationship with each individual athlete, and he needed to communicate in different ways with each individual in order to make them feel safe. This also implies that communication was the driving force behind the relationship, and that what was communicated and how it was done were vital to the quality of the relationship in terms of generating a sense of safety.

In Coach 1's description of communication he uses phrases like "at the right level" and "the right wavelength". This shows, above all, that the coach and athlete form a unit where both can influence each other and where there is two-way communication – in other words, a dialogue. Although Coach 1 took primary responsibility for adapting his communication style to individual athletes, they were also required and expected to

contribute, and what the athletes communicated played an important role in making him feel safe in his coaching role, which he stressed was one of the keys to him performing to the very best of his ability. Coach 2, meanwhile, emphasised the following aspects of her relationships with the athletes:

> It is important for them to completely trust that I will wholeheartedly do what is needed for the team to succeed, because that is my main job, but at the same time they want me to believe in them and to be honest in my communication and feedback […], and also to feel that I view them as a whole person and care about that whole person.

Performance and development were always the top priorities, both for the coach and the athletes. This was apparent from Coach 2's assertion that to a large extent the athletes' trust in her as a coach was a result of seeing and experiencing that she lived up to what they expected of a national coach. At the same time, Coach 2 stressed that she wanted the athletes to feel confident that she cared about and looked after each of them as a whole person. Coach 2's choice of words suggests that there was a potential contradiction between wholeheartedly doing what was needed for the team to succeed and wanting what was best for the athletes and believing in them. This may partly be because events or situations can occur in athletes' lives that prevent them from performing at their very best level. Examples of this might include injuries or other challenging situations in life. Coach 2 may have chosen not to select athletes for the national team based on their performance, but that was by no means synonymous with her not caring about the individual who was told by her that they were not performing at a sufficiently high level at that particular point in time. It may have been a difficult balancing act to both set clear performance standards that she expected of the athletes, while also being

equally clear that she cared about them as people, even if they were not meeting her

performance standards.

Discussion

Overall, the findings of this study show that both of these serial winning coaches

(SWCs) considered the quality of their relationships with their athletes as a key prerequisite

for good performance. Developing and maintaining high-quality coach-athlete relationships,

while also taking into account the needs of the team as a whole, was a challenge that occupied

a great deal of both coaches' time. Moreover, they recognised that as coaches they had unique

coach-athlete relationships with all of their athletes, which required them to greatly adapt how

they interacted, by being able to see the other person's perspective, as well as being flexible in

how they communicated depending on the athlete and the situation. Having high-quality

relationships was in many ways the best tool for minimising unwanted disruptions and risks in

a context that involves a high degree of inherent uncertainty and varying degrees of risk.

When describing the key characteristics of good coach-athlete relationships, these coaches

repeatedly used the words safety and trust. Both coaches mentioned the importance of the

athletes trusting that they as coaches were doing everything in their power to help the athletes

succeed. However, this was more explicitly stated by Coach 1 than Coach 2 in their

descriptions of what they did to build good relationships. This may be related to the fact that

Coach 1 was involved in a sport where the athletes exposed themselves to genuine danger

when participating in their sport, and where they were completely reliant on the coach

performing his tasks to the very highest standards in order to avoid unnecessary risks. At the

heart of what they meant by safety was the idea of mutual respect and the athletes having a

good enough relationship with their coach to be able to be honest and direct about their needs and what was important in order to further improve their performance.

In organisational research, the term psychological safety, which primarily refers to a group-level phenomenon (Edmondson, 2019), is considered important to our understanding of how people work together to achieve a common goal. Psychological safety is also similar to the kind of safety that the coaches in this study highlighted as important to raising performance as it was not about individual team members' personal feelings of psychological safety based on their personalities, but rather about a joint feeling that it is safe to be yourself and to openly express your thoughts in a group (Bang & Midelfart, 2019). Although there are various definitions of psychological safety, the one that appears to be most widely accepted is Edmondson's definition from 1999 that "Psychological safety is the belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (Edmondson, 1999). One of the characteristics of a psychologically safe working environment is that everyone who works there feels mutual trust and respect for each other, and feels safe that if they step forward by asking questions, reporting problems, raising worries, asking for feedback or making new proposals, they will not be punished or humiliated in any way (Edmondson, 2019). At the same time, it is important to realise that the term psychologically safe environment does not refer to a cosy environment without any problems or pressure, or one where people are not held accountable for their mistakes. On the contrary, people in a psychologically safe environment can fully focus on achieving their joint goals through productive but also challenging discussions, rather than focusing on protecting themselves. (Edmondson, 2019)

To our knowledge, the concept of psychological safety has not been investigated in sport settings. Nevertheless, as far back as 2009 it was claimed that, due to the incredibly rapid development of elite sport and the psychosocial impacts on those involved, organisational psychology could provide a valuable contribution to our understanding of the

increasing complexity of elite sport and how this affects world-class athletes (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). A meta-study from 2014, found that psychological safety has the biggest impact on groups and teams that are solving complex tasks that require a high degree of coordination and collaboration between the group members, as they are dependent on each other for success (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Hence, the impact of psychological safety is greatest in environments of the kind found in the context of elite sport. The same meta-study found that, although all of the group members helped to make the group psychologically safe, the leader occupied a unique position. How the leader behaved and reacted when the members dared to express their thoughts openly and honestly was the key to developing psychological safety within the group. There is also a recognition that, in the demanding context of elite sport, coaches play a particularly important role, because they have chief responsibility for both the training process and the athletes' performances (Mallett, 2010). Equally, the effectiveness of a coach depends on interaction, both between individuals and within the group as a whole. In order to succeed, the coach must regularly interact with athletes, the support staff and other professionals (Gilbert & Côté, 2013). In view of the similarities between the environments where psychological safety has proved to be most effective and the characteristics of elite sport, as well as the parallel importance of the leader and coach in setting the basic relational conditions, it would be interesting to further discuss our results in light of this concept of psychological safety.

Studies show a positive correlation between psychological safety and performance, with team learning usually being the mediating factor (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). In fact, it has been argued that the interpersonal experience of psychological safety is vital to enabling behaviours essential to learning and change, at the level of individuals, teams and organisations (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). One important reason for this is that psychological safety enables employees and groups to focus on the tasks that will lead to

better performance, by reducing the potential negative ramifications of showing initiative or making mistakes (Edmondson, 1999). Hence, helping to create a sense of psychological safety represents an important contribution towards remaining competitive (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). This corresponds with Coach 1 and Coach 2's view of the purpose of the kind of relationships and team spirit they aspired to in their teams. The primary goal was at all times to perform at a world-class level, and that goal informed all of their choices and actions. Thus, the kind of interpersonal environment that these coaches wanted was based on what they thought would provide the best foundation for promoting the athletes' development and learning, and hence improving their performances. However, it should also be pointed out that psychological safety is not by itself enough to achieve great performances. The purpose of psychological safety is to create the optimal conditions for learning, and to avoid unnecessary mistakes (Edmondson, 2019). This is also backed up by the results of a major research project conducted by Google within in its own organisation. The goal of the project was to identify where the difference lay between the good and bad teams at Google. The study found five factors that varied between the two kinds of teams, but one of those factors was most important, as it was a fundamental prerequisite for the existence of the others. That fundamental factor was psychological safety (Duhigg, 2016). This agrees with the views of Coach 1 and Coach 2, who wanted their athletes to feel safe enough to be open and direct in their communication of what was important in order for them to perform to the best of their ability or further raise their level.

In addition to the link between psychological safety and performance, a study into how the quality of relationships promotes learning through its impact on psychological safety found that having high-quality relationships is a key relational mechanism that promotes psychological safety, and hence further/subsequent learning behaviour (Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009). It has been argued that part of the reason for this is that relationships based on

trust and respect have greater capacity to encompass both positive and negative feelings, can cope with bigger stressors and changes in the relationship and are more open to new ideas (Carmeli, 2007; Carmeli & Gittell, 2009).

As well as safety, the concept of trust was central to both coaches' descriptions of what was most important to creating high-quality relationships with their athletes. Psychological safety and trust are related concepts that both incorporate elements of risk and vulnerability, but there are nevertheless some important differences too. One important difference, as previously mentioned, is that psychological safety is experienced at the group level. Trust, on the other hand, relates to interactions between two people or parties, with the trust existing in the mind of one person and relating specifically to another person or organisation (Edmondson, 2019). For example, an athlete may trust his or her physical trainer, but not the national coach. According to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), the definition of trust is a willingness to make yourself vulnerable to the actions of others. Trust involves an expectation that you can be confident another person (or organisation) will do what he/she has promised to do in the future. Psychological safety, on the other hand, is linked to an immediate interpersonal impact on you openly say what you think, whether that is something you are in doubt or unsure about, something you have done wrong, or something you disagree with or are critical of (Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan, & Vracheva, 2017).

Although both coaches stressed the importance of having the athletes' trust, it was a more prominent element of Coach 1's account. As previously stated, this may be partly related to the high-risk nature of the sport that Coach 1 was involved in. In order to perform at a world-class level, the athletes had to be willing to take a certain amount of risk. For Coach 1, the question of trust was particularly relevant to his role as a facilitator. By facilitating their performances through his actions as national coach, he demonstrated to them that it was safe for them to give him the benefit of the doubt and thus trust that he would perform to the same

standard in the future. This probably helped to improve performance, as it created a realistic boundary between necessary and unnecessary risk, based on the inherent risks of the sport, and not on the possibility of unnecessary risks arising due to the coach not doing his job properly.

The research done to date is scares when it comes to our understanding of how psychological safety can be built up and developed, or reduced and destroyed (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). However, the process is thought to be asymmetrical, in the sense that it takes time to build up psychological safety by responding positively when other people show vulnerability or conduct themselves in some other way that could be considered risky at an interpersonal level, whereas it can be destroyed in an instant by a negative response to someone is making themselves vulnerable.

How can psychological safety be built up?

There are many attitudes and actions that play an important role in creating psychological safety. One important step towards creating a good foundation is to implement actions that help the people involved to take onboard and accept the team's common goals, and that highlight the value of what the group wants to achieve together (Edmondson, 2019). Both Coach 1 and Coach 2 put a lot of work over an extended period into creating this basic sense of community in their respective teams. By having the attitude, as national coach, that it was the whole team that was going to achieve something together, in spite of the fact that the athletes competed individually, Coach 1 emphasised that he saw the community as having a valuable role to play in helping the individual athletes to perform to the best of their abilities. He built on this basic pillar of his coaching philosophy through his actions, which meant that he was walking a constant tightrope between the needs of the individual and those of the team as a whole, and balancing them on a case-by-case basis.

In order to establish and maintain the feeling of safety needed to deal with the inherent uncertainty of competition, Coach 2 stressed what she called the process of actively establishing the values of the team. These were active processes in the sense that the team worked to create a joint understanding of the important ingredients needed for everyone to feel safe as a group. It was not about wanting them to get on well, but rather about establishing a joint set of values so that the personal interactions provided the feeling of safety needed to handle the inherent uncertainty of the context, while also maintaining a high level of performance. There are similarities between the value-building processes initiated and implemented by Coach 2 and the kind of leadership thought to play a particularly important role in creating psychological safety, where the leader manages to give convincing and credible reasons as to why it is important for everyone in the team or group to share their opinions openly and honestly (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2012). This kind of rationale might be, for example, that what the team needs to achieve or perform together is so complex and challenging that the only way that the whole group will understand the nature and demands of the task is if everyone contributes and holds nothing back.

The basic premise for the coaches' contact and interaction with the individual athlete was a recognition that their perspective or understanding of the situation did not represent the only reality or correct answer. They showed empathy and were inquisitive about the athlete's understanding or perspective, as it was important for them to understand it in order to give the best possible support to the athlete. To help the athletes build up the necessary psychological safety so that they would be willing to express their views and needs, the coaches interested themselves in each athlete as a whole person, showing genuine curiosity about what was important in order for him/her to perform well. As coaches they were conscious of their responsibility as team leaders and displayed great flexibility in both the style and content of their communication and interaction with the athletes, adapting themselves to each individual,

while also showing humility and respect for the athletes' knowledge and expertise. They understood the importance of understanding and engaging with the athletes' experiences when they were not performing at their best, in spite of the fact that this meant sharing difficult feelings and having challenging conversations. This kind of conduct and attitudes on the part of the coaches corresponds with the attitudes and conduct that Edmondson (2019) claimed play a critical role in getting people to engage with their leaders in activities and discussions to raise performance, namely that the leader's invitation must feel compelling and genuine. There are two kinds of behaviour which particularly signal that an invitation is genuine: situational humility and proactive enquiry. Situational humility represents a mindset which combines humility in the sense that you recognise that you as a leader do not have all the answers, and curiosity in the sense that you have a mindset that signals that there is always more to learn. Research shows that when leaders display humility, it promotes better learning behaviour in teams (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013).

Proactive inquiry involves aiming to achieve an objective by engaging with another person to learn more about a situation, an issue or the person (Edmondson, 2019). The results of this study show that both coaches used proactive inquiry, by always showing genuine interest in all of their athletes and their responses, as an important tool for creating the feeling of safety they considered vital to the athletes' performance.

With respect to using proactive inquiry as a tool for creating psychological safety, Edmondson (2019) points out that this is highly challenging. This is on account of a cognitive bias known as naive realism (Ross & Ward, 1997). Naive realism refers to the fact that we tend to think we know what is going on based entirely on our own perceptions. We fall into the "trap" of viewing our own experiences as reality, rather than a subjective interpretation of reality, and forget that other people may interpret the same reality in other ways (Edmondson, 2019). If we do this, we eventually stop being curious and actively engaging with other people

in order to learn and improve our understanding, which destroys any chance of building up psychological safety. It is clear, however, that the coaches in this study did not suffer from this cognitive bias, and that they used proactive inquiry as an essential tool in their efforts to build up psychological safety. Nevertheless, Coach 2 acknowledged that early on in her coaching career she was more prone to acting as if her own view represented the only reality, but she now recognised that doing so had greatly limited the athletes' learning processes and development. This kind of acknowledgement, admitting to the athletes that she had made mistakes and done things inappropriately, and had now changed her approach, is also an important way in which a leader can help to create psychological safety in a group or team (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2012).

Conclusion

In this study, the concept of psychological safety and other research related to that concept have provided a good theoretical framework for understanding these coaches' stories. Unpicking the differences between the terms psychological safety and trust (Edmondson, 2019) also helped to put important details in the coaches' stories in a theoretical perspective.

The strength of this study lies in using IPA to analyse the detailed and nuanced accounts of the coaches. This reflects the idiographic focus typical of IPA, which also means that IPA studies often have a small number of participants. This is considered to have an intrinsic value, as it makes it possible to gain insight into and understand the important meanings of each case (Smith, 2004). The findings of this study can thus offer important insights to coaches, support staff and sports psychologists working within the highly demanding, unpredictable and complex environment of world class sport. In addition, the findings of this study may also provide useful knowledge for people developing courses to train the next generation of SWCs with respect to what factors help to create good relational conditions for development and high performance. However, it is important to stress that this

study cannot offer any definitive answer as to what represents the best relational and environmental conditions between the coach and his/her athletes in world class sport, and how to create this kind of environment. Although this study contributes what we consider to be interesting perspectives in the quest to improve our understanding of the complexity of the work done by SWCs, we recognise that other stories and perspectives will provide additional insight into what typifies optimal performance environments and what things SWCs do to create good relational conditions for development and high performance. Key factors may include the personality of both the coach and the athlete, the size of the sporting and/or performance team, the risk level in the sport in question, and the extent to which the coach needs to be involved in the athletes' day-to-day training in order to ensure that it is of a sufficiently high standard.

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Paper IV

Frøyen, A. F., Pensgaard, A. M., & Gustafsson, H. The art of communication: An in-depth study of a serial winning coach and two world-class athletes, (manuscript).

The art of communication: An in-depth study of a serial winning coach and two world-

class athletes

If you improve communication and dialogue, I think we will end up with even more athletes

performing well over an extended period; I think that's an important element that's missing.

Abstract

This study aimed to explore in detail the use of communication, its meaning, and purpose in two coach-athlete dyads performing at the world-class level. With the application of semi-structured interviews and multiperspectival Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the results informed four emergent superordinate themes; 1) Making sure life does not get in the way of performance, 2) Communication in training - preparation for the competition, 3) Competition - communication when the adrenaline is pumping, and 4) When the going gets (really) tough. Overall, the analysis revealed mattering perspectives in explaining the communication process and the significance of different communication strategies to enhance relationship quality and performances at a world-class level. The superordinate themes are further discussed with the use of the concept of empathic accuracy and research relating to communication with the argument that the communication process within the dyad increased empathic accuracy, which again improved the quality of the subsequent communication process.

Key words: world-class sport, empathic accuracy, relationship quality, IPA, communication quality.

Introduction

High-performance coaching is a profoundly relational activity, with several relationship constellations being important (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). However, for athletes the relationship they develop with their coach is considered to be of greatest importance to their sporting development and performance level (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). The coach-athlete relationship is defined as being a social situation within which the coach's and the athlete's feelings, thoughts and behaviours are mutually and causally interdependent (Jowett & Meek, 2000). The most commonly used framework for analysing the coach-athlete relationship based on this definition is the 3+1C model that measures the emotions, thoughts and behaviour of the coach and athlete within their relationship (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016; Yang & Jowett, 2017). The 3Cs in the model represent the psychological constructs closeness, commitment and complementarity (Jowett & Clark-Carter, 2006). Closeness reflects the extent to which the coach and the athlete trust, appreciate, like and value each other, and thus represents the affective aspect of the relationships (Yang & Jowett, 2017). Commitment reflects the extent to which the coach and the athlete have a long-term perspective for their relationship as well as their intention to maintain close ties with each other over time. Hence, commitment represents the cognitive aspect of their relationship. Complementarity refers to the behavioural aspect of the coach-athlete relationship and reflects the extent to which the coach and the athlete correspond and complement each other. Taken together, the 3Cs frame the social context in which the coach's and the athlete's experiences, roles and behaviours take place (Jowett & Clark-Carter, 2006; Yang & Jowett, 2017).

To capture the complexity and also the quality of the relationship one needs to measure the degree of interdependence of the 3Cs (Jowett & Felton, 2014), which is the +1C

in the model – co-orientation. Taken together, the 3+1Cs define the relationship quality

between the coach and each of his/her athletes (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016).

At the highest level in sport, the coach-athlete relationship should be seen much more

as a collaborative than as a hierarchical relationship with the coach having the most power

(Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). The relationship between the coach and athlete is also often

typified by being task-oriented, where the aim is to create situations that both parties consider

meaningful and beneficial, and where both parties support each other in achieving the goals

that are relevant to their relationship (Jowett, 2017). A relationship where the coach and the

athlete are meaningfully connected is more likely to stimulate, encourage, satisfy, and support

the goal of improving their sporting experience, as well as their overall well-being (Davis,

Jowett, & Tafvelin, 2019).

Various studies have underscored the importance of the coach-athlete relationship,

since high relationship quality is correlated with effective coaching behaviours (Olympiou,

Jowett & Duda, 2008) and more satisfaction with training, performance, and personal

treatment (Jowett, Shanmugam, & Caccoulis, 2012; Yang, Jowett, & Chan, 2015).

Consequently, it has been argued that a coach-athlete-centred approach to coaching is most

suited as a base from which to understand the entire process and practice of coaching and also

its effectiveness (Jowett, 2017). Coaching is an interpersonal process where both a coach and

an athlete necessarily engage with one another. Thus, effective coaching could be more

readily explained through the quality of the relationships that coaches and athletes develop

(Jowett, 2017).

Since coaches' effectiveness depends on interactions with other people, Côté and

Gilbert (2009) have also emphasized in their integrative definition of coaching effectiveness

that to be an effective coach requires not only a high level of professional knowledge but also

a high level of interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge and skills. Hence, in addition to

developing their ability to teach sport-specific skills, it is essential for coaches to continuously refine their interpersonal knowledge base so that they can communicate competently and efficiently with their athletes, and also be able to learn from their manner of being (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Gilbert & Côté, 2013)

According to Gilbert (2017), the most effective strategy for coaches to use to build and maintain the quality of the coach-athlete relationship is communication. Research does provide support for the efficacy of communication strategies in maintaining and improving the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and athletes' experience of sport satisfaction (Davis et al., 2019; Rhind & Jowett, 2011). However, research investigating the role of communication strategies within the coach-athlete relationship is still scarce (Davis et al., 2019). Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate in detail the use of communication, its meaning and purpose in the relationships between one coach and two of his athletes performing at the world-class level. Conducting dyadic studies is also vital as a way of capturing the complexities of coach-athlete relationships, as coaches and athletes do not communicate in isolation (Davis et al., 2019). Communication includes everything that coaches and athletes say or do and is the means that allows coaches and athletes to come together emotionally, cognitively, and behaviourally (LaVoi, 2007). In line with the purpose of this study, which was to obtain detailed information about the communication process, its role, and function within two coach-athlete dyads, a qualitative approach was also considered appropriate. A qualitative approach may be especially suitable in research with the goal of obtaining detailed information about significant groups, in this case the coach-athlete relationship in world-class sport (Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999; Simonton, 1999). A qualitative approach considered particularly suitable if one is interested in interpreting complex or dynamic phenomena is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The purpose of IPA is to perform a comprehensive analysis of personal experience, the value of these experiences,

and how the participants attach meaning to them (Smith, 2017). Researchers also argue that a multi-perspective IPA design may be valuable when addressing research questions that engage with experiences and processes that are intersubjective and relational (Larkin, Shaw, & Flowers, 2019), as is the case in this dyadic study of one coach and two of his athletes. Based on these arguments, the use of IPA as the methodology with a multi-perspective design was deemed appropriate.

Method

IPA is a qualitative methodology concerned with personal lived experience and meaning-making (Smith, 2017). IPA has been developed within the field of psychology and is built on three theoretical underpinnings: idiography, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Particularly prominent in the phenomenological foundations for IPA is Husserl and his concern with finding the essence of experience. However, in IPA, this perspective has been adjusted, as the purpose is to produce an account of lived experience on its own terms rather than one directed by pre-existing theoretical concepts or theories (Smith & Osborn, 2015). In IPA there is a recognition that the production of these accounts necessarily requires a process of interpretation for both the participant and the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Here IPA's theoretical grounding in hermeneutics also becomes apparent, as the researcher tries to make sense of the participant's attempt to make sense of their experiences, which implies a double hermeneutics. The theoretical underpinning of idiography is evident in IPA's commitment to exploring each case in extensive detail as an entity in its own right before moving to more general claims (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA's focus on the specifics is also the reason why sample sizes in studies using IPA are small.

The multiperspectival IPA design preserves its connections to the concepts of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Larkin et al., 2019). However, the multiperspectival design also forms links to concepts from systemic psychology. This grounding in systemic psychology is particularly evident in IPA's concern with the function of language, even though it is not fundamentally defined or constrained by that interest. IPA and systemic theory also share the view that a third person can understand different personal viewpoints on the world, focusing on patterns of meaning-making, if one begins from the belief that each viewpoint elucidates an essential aspect of a shared reality (Larkin et al., 2019). Multiperspectival IPA also maintains a commitment to idiography in data collection and analysis but extends this by linking two or more focal perspectives, allowing the researcher to analyse the relational and intersubjective dimensions of a given phenomenon (Larkin et al., 2019).

Participants

Before being initiated, the study had received ethical approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).

There were three participants in this study, one serial winning coach and two super-elite athletes (gold medallist at the Olympics or World Championships) who trained with this coach. Athlete 1 is female, and Athlete 2 is male. The athletes competed in an individual sport, and both still performed at a world-class level when the interviews took place. Both athletes had trained with this coach throughout their career at this level. The coach in this study was a Serial Winning Coach (SWC) in world-class sport. To qualify as a Serial Winning Coach (SWC), two criteria must be met; *a) they have won multiple championships at the Olympics, World championships, and/or in highly recognized professional leagues; b) they have done so with multiple teams or individual athletes over a prolonged period of time* (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016, p. 221). The sport-specific inclusion criteria chosen for the

athletes was that the participants should have two or more medals from world-class championships, Olympic Games, or competitions at an equivalent level.

Procedure

All three participants received information about the study and an invitation to participate in writing. It was emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study if they so wished without having to give any reasons. It was also stressed that the interviews would be handled confidentially. In order to warrant this confidentiality, we changed the names of the athletes to Athlete 1 (female athlete) and Athlete 2 (male athlete). The data were collected with the use of semi-structured interviews, and it was the first author who conducted all of the interviews. As the purpose of this study was to obtain in-depth insight into the relational uniqueness of two coach-athlete dyads, we collected the data in two steps. The first step consisted of individual interviews with all three participants. The interviews were then transcribed ad verbatim by the first author. Based on the content of these transcripts, a new semi-structured interview guide was developed for the second step in the data collection. The second step of the data collection consisted of two dyadic interviews, the first with the coach and Athlete 1 and the other with the coach and Athlete 2. The goal of this second interview was to let the participants elaborate on their experiences expressed in the first interview seen from the perspective of both the athletes and the coach. The dyadic interviews were also transcribed ad verbatim by the first author. The individual interviews lasted approximately 1.5 hours. The dyadic interview with the coach and Athlete 1 lasted 1.5 hours, while the dyadic interview with the coach and Athlete 2 lasted 1 hour.

In their entirety, the interview guides consisted of questions aimed to uncover encounters and contextual details, and how the participant made sense of them. The acquisition of sufficient trust is a fundamental aspect of this kind of phenomenological work,

because the researcher is reliant on the participants telling a stranger about their personal experiences. To facilitate rapport, we started the individual interviews with a talk about the participant's career; how it all began, and how it progressed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Later in the interview, the questions focused in on the participants' experiences, feelings and views on the coach-athlete relationship and their use of communication, with an emphasis on using wordings that encouraged the participants to tell their stories. One aspect of the phenomenological approach that was fundamental at this point was that the researcher encouraged the participants to give detailed accounts of actual experiences that had occurred, because it is the participant who is considered to be the expert (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Analysis

Multiperspectival IPA begins with a traditional idiographic procedure. However, the analytical design of multiperspectival IPA incorporates the analysis not only within samples but also between samples (Larkin et al., 2019). After analysing each personal case, the researcher then continues the analysis by moving outwards, in the sense that the researcher continues the analysis on a larger sample group or dyad, and then further between and across samples (Larkin et al., 2019).

In this particular study, the first step in the analytical process was to analyse each personal case of Athlete 1, Athlete 2 and the coach separately, following the fundamental steps of traditional IPA described in Smith et al., (2009). This four-step analytical process resulted in the production of a table of subordinate themes representing related topics for each participant. The first step moving outwards was to look for similarities and differences among the athletes as one sample group, which made it possible to identify different perceptions and meanings as either new manifestations of existing themes or as new themes. Further analysis then focused on developing these themes within the next unit of development, e.g. within each

dyad. Finally, we analysed the themes developed, identifying patterns and connections, as well as differences, between the two dyads.

Results

Interpersonal communication is considered to be a key factor that both influences and is influenced by the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Although the use of communication between this coach and his two athletes was personalized and had unique dynamics, it could still be grouped under four superordinate themes: 1) Making sure that life does not get in the way of performance, 2) Communication in training – preparation for competition, 3) Competition – communication when the adrenaline is pumping, and 4) When the going gets (really) tough.

Making sure that life does not get in the way of performance

C: "The human aspect is really important to me. I think that all athletes, all people, are very different, so it's important to put yourselves in the shoes of the athlete; not just think about what the textbook says you should do. Yes, you must train really hard, you must do this and that, but putting yourself in the athlete's shoes and getting involved in the human aspect, I think that's really important. So I think it is important to bear those things in mind, and I'm also very available for the athletes; you develop a personal relationship to them, try to help them in all sorts of ways. It can get extremely intense when they are having problems with their boyfriend or girlfriend, or with their job and that kind of thing, but I think it's important towards creating trust over the long term."

Q: "What do you do to get them to let you into their personal lives?"

C: "Well, I don't really do that much, I'm just there and talk to them, talk WITH them, in other words look them in the eyes and show that I care about them. I don't feel that I do much more than that, but I feel that it comes very naturally if you do that. But that's what it's mostly about, taking the time to talk with them, help them, guide them, make adjustments as you go along, etc. I think you see most things with your own eyes; when you speak with a person you see it. It's a very natural process for me; I don't know …"

The first thing the coach mentions when describing himself as a coach is that he is concerned with the human aspect, which highlights that caring about his athletes as people is very important to him. Being a person involves more than just being an athlete. Caring about the human aspect means that he cares about who they are as people and about how their lives are going. His recognition that everyone is different and that he needs to understand each individual, as well as the fact that he does this by trying to see the situation from their perspective, also show an awareness that reality can be interpreted in different ways, and that his way of seeing things is therefore not the only way. As well as the athletes perceiving things in different ways from him, they may also have different personalities, different experiences, different lives, different challenges, different learning strategies, different pressures and different needs. It also emerges that as well as using verbal communication with the athletes as a tool for getting to know them and building trust, he also uses their body language as an important source of information, as we can see from the fact that he says he gets a lot of information about their state of mind by looking them in the eyes. In other words, he doesn't consider that the coaching role is purely about technical coaching issues. Bearing in mind that he is the coach of world-class athletes, it is natural to assume that his emphasis on the human aspect ultimately reflects his experience that doing so boosts athletes'

performances. For the technical aspects of his coaching to be as effective as possible, they must be tailored to the individual. Knowing someone enables him to make the necessary allowances to ensure that individual athletes maintain their performance levels over time, for example by making sure that the overall stress on them isn't too great.

The impact on Athlete 2 of the coach making an effort to get to know athletes as whole people can be seen in the following exchange:

Athlete 2: "I think I've come across as a keen athlete who is pretty conscientious, perhaps I've been a bit too conscientious about following plans, so I've overdone it a few times in my career – it's that thing of listening to your body, and not doing it has been one of my weaknesses, really. XXXXX [coach's name] has been very good at getting me to take it easy rather than pushing me; 'have that weekend with your family', or whatever, 'I think that would be the smart [stressed] decision, wouldn't it?'".

C: "From previous experience with him I knew that if he overdoes it his level completely crashes […] when you get to know him a bit, you know what works for him and what doesn't."

Athlete 2: "You [the coach] make various small decisions for me, don't you, and I think I need that sometimes."

The coach and athlete have a shared understanding of the athlete as highly conscientious and having a tendency to push himself too hard out of a sense of duty to plans and expectations rather than listening to his body. The athlete uses the phrases "overdone it" and "listening to your body". Overdoing it often means that you're forced to rest for a while because your body stops working, that you're physically and mentally exhausted because

you're under too much stress, and that you don't perform or develop as expected because you are too tired to complete and benefit from your training. In order to avoid "overdoing it", it is necessary to "listen to your body". From the athlete's comments we can gather that in his case listening to his body meant not doing the planned training session and instead resting. At the same time, he admits that at times he has chosen to stick to plans in spite of knowing deep down that it would have been more sensible to rest. Being conscientious and faithful to the plan are so important to him that he risks taking decisions that are bad for him. He expresses gratitude to the coach for deciding on his behalf when he should rest, so that he doesn't need to take that decision. The reason he is willing to allow the coach to take decisions on his behalf is probably that he feels the coach views him in the same way as he sees himself, and that the coach is therefore qualified to take decisions on his behalf, and thus ensure that he doesn't overdo it again or have too much stress in his life.

Athlete 1 also confirms that she clearly notices that the coach genuinely cares about his athletes and makes an effort to get to know them and be there for them if there is anything bothering them or something that should be taking into consideration in order to ensure that training sessions maintain a high quality:

Athlete 1: "I think he is very skilled at that [seeing the human aspect]. But what xxxxx [name of the coach] is very good at is dealing with things when he senses that there is an issue. I see it in exactly the same way as you [the coach] have described; you say that the more you get to know the athletes the easier it is to pick up on and notice things, and then he's really good at dealing with it when he does notice it. But I think that's maybe because you have a way of seeing the individual people, you're able to do that, and so you must be good at seeing how they are acting and whether or not it is natural to raise something."

C: "I think that, as she [Athlete 1] says, I try to look at the whole reaction, the body language. When you're training, when you're talking, you notice that something is going on and so I pull the person aside and we sit down and have a chat, and then it turns out there's much more going on than I had assumed. There are lots of underlying issues, but when we start analysing it and talking about it, they're really just small things, just certain actions that need to be taken and it may be partly personal stuff and partly to do with training. I think it's pretty easy as long as you keep a look out, notice things and are there for people."

Above all, what this highlights is that the coach's intentions as a coach correspond with how his coaching practice is viewed by the athletes. The coach shows genuine interest in his athletes by being there for them and really getting to know each individual by talking to them and observing their body language. In addition, the athlete stresses that the coach, as well as maintaining a good dialogue and having a unique ability to use body language as a source of information, is good at dealing with situations. This refers to the fact that if the coach sensed that some of the athletes weren't happy or that there was something bothering them, he continued the dialogue with a clear aim of finding out what was wrong, in order to come up with potential actions to improve the situation for the athlete. In other words, he clearly communicated to the athletes that he wanted to be involved and help where possible.

Communication in training – preparation for competition

As well as communication being an important tool for being able to make the necessary allowances, it also emerged that communication in the coach-athlete interaction was an important area of focus during normal training as a way of ensuring optimal preparation for competition:

Athlete 1: "Everything we do in training is geared towards what we will be doing in competitions, and if it works well in training we try to do the same thing in competition too […]."

Q: "Can you give any specific examples of what you have done to give yourself an edge?"

C: "In the case of Athlete 1, who's a very thorough person, as far as I'm concerned it's been about working a bit harder to find ways to get her to understand the things that I think are important for her to perform well, and over time I've learned that the fewer tasks the better, as far as she's concerned … So I feel that for her it has been a case of working and working and working, and it has taken a few years, but as she says, after we managed to get the chemistry right in terms of coaching and understanding each other, she made a breakthrough, and in the championships where she has done well we've given her really, really simple tasks.

Q: "So the simpler the better?"

Athlete 1 & C: Yes.

Day-to-day training isn't just a venue for the physical, technical and tactical preparations for competitions, it is also where they prepare the communication and dialogue between them in order to make them as effective as possible. How they communicate with each other is a performance-enhancing factor they invest a lot of time in perfecting. The coach has also made a special effort to learn how he must coach her specifically in order for her to perform well. He understands and recognises that his way of communicating must necessarily be adapted to her needs in a high-performance context. Developing that understanding of her situational needs and learning how to adjust his communication to meet her needs and achieve the right chemistry has been a very time-consuming process. It took several years of hard

work to achieve the chemistry between them that enabled the athlete to make her break-through. The fact that they chose to put so much work into their interpersonal relationship shows that they consider this to be a key factor in the athlete's performances, and how finely tuned they believe that the chemistry between them needs to be. The coach and athlete also express a shared/similar understanding of the fact that giving her simple tasks is an important reason why his coaching helps her to perform well. This unanimity and shared understanding may reflect the fact that both of them have seen that how they communicate affects how she performs, and that working out what is important to ensuring effective interaction between them has been a joint, mutual project.

Athlete 2's description of what was and is most important to him in his relationship with the coach again stresses the importance of the coach's communication skills:

> Athlete 2: [On the most important aspect of his relationship with his coach.] "I suppose it's the fact that he says the right things, in a way, that he listens and doesn't just give a random spiel that doesn't feel relevant to me. What he says generally makes sense and I feel he has taken in what I've said."

In many ways, the most important thing for the athlete in his relationship with the coach is for the coach to live up to his demands with respect to the quality of communication. The coach must say the right things, which means the ones that are relevant to him. The fact that feedback is relevant to him and feels right may be about the athlete recognising what is said as being useful to him in terms of how he experiences the situation. The coach must also listen to him and the athlete must feel that he has taken in what he has said. On the one hand, the coach listening may be a question of him showing interest in what the athlete actually says to him. On the other hand, it may also be about something more than that, if you look at it in

the context of the coach's stated interest in the human aspect and the athletes' emphasis on his unique ability to understand individuals by using both the athletes' verbal communication and their body language as important sources of information when deciding how to respond to them. The comments about listening to the athlete and taking in what he says may therefore also refer to the importance the athlete places on the coach reading his body language and thus listening to the things he communicates non-verbally.

In light of Athlete 2's comments about what is the most important aspect of his relationship with his coach, the following shows how in purely practical terms the coach strives to live up to the demands and expectations of the athlete:

C: "Leading up to the world champs, we [the coach and Athlete 2] will have worked closely together throughout the year on everything, at daily training sessions, at training camps, at competitions; we talk a lot before and after them, etc. so that we're pulling together, and when we get to a championship he has very clear tasks, and I know what to say to make sure there isn't anything new, anything to stress him out. Because he's very thorough and meticulous in what he does, so I think it's important to give him very few tasks, and generally those tasks are things that we've drilled throughout the year so there's total coordination, there's a really solid foundation, and there's so much trust, he trusts me one hundred percent, and I trust him one hundred percent, he trusts me more than I trust myself."

In other words, communication is also an area of performance that has to be worked on and made second nature during training towards competitions. The dialogue between them is the tool that ensures agreement and a shared understanding of what elements of their communication are needed for the athlete to perform to the best of his ability. This close

coordination also gives the coach confidence, as there is mutual agreement on the needs and expectations of the athlete in the situation and how the coach can do his bit to satisfy those needs and live up to the athlete's expectations. It appears that the coach uses training sessions and the time he spends with the athlete to develop a tailored "communication chart" to ensure that he helps to improve the athlete's performances, and the fact that both of them know exactly how the coach will use this chart generates great trust and confidence between them, and perhaps particularly in the athlete.

Competition – communication when the adrenaline is pumping

For athletes and coaches at this level, competitions are often highly significant moments where all of the hours of training and preparation hopefully manifest themselves in the athletes performing to the best of their ability. The practical importance of the coach having built up an understanding of the athlete, and of how he should communicate in order for Athlete 1 to perform at her best, can be seen in how she and the coach describe their interaction in a competition situation:

> C: "I am very open to her own thoughts, but I'm a bit selective about it, because even if she sometimes says 'give me advice on so-and-so, let me know about that' during a competition, in a match, I know that if I do that it will get too much and she will come in at half time and not understand anything, so I select things based on what she's said […]. What I try to do when she gets a bit agitated is to say 'no, let's forget about that and just focus on this' (with a strict voice), because if I say it gently, I know that she'll be 'but, but, but, but …'. I've definitely learned that I have to be clear and decisive, and I know that then she'll take it on board fine, so we go ahead with that and see what happens and generally it works out well."

Athlete 1: "Again it's that confidence I have in what you're saying. I know that if

that's what you think, then it's the best thing to do, because we've come this far by

doing that. But I just have to be reminded about it, because I really want to look at

everything, but that doesn't work at all."

The decisions taken by the coach are based on what kind of feedback the athlete wants

from him, his knowledge of her, and previous experiences of what kind of feedback and

communication actually improves her performance. Both the coach and athlete know that she

sometimes asks for feedback that isn't necessarily beneficial to her performance. In a

competition situation the coach knows better than her what feedback she really needs in order

to perform to the best of her ability, and they are both conscious of that and have experienced

it previously. In other words, they both have most confidence in his judgements in a

competition situation. Nevertheless, she needs to be reminded of that, because her desire to

focus on improving all aspects of her performance can overshadow the things that are most

important for her to focus on in a specific match situation in order to maximise her chances of

winning.

Athlete 2 had different needs from Athlete 1 in a competition situation, which affected

the communication and the interaction between him and the coach:

Q: "What is it most important for the coach to know about you in order to get the best

out of you?"

Athlete 2: "In a competition it's getting me to calm down. Very often, there are things

that mean you're very nervous and have lots of things to deal with, and when that

happens he has a unique ability to use his body language, and maybe a few words, to

come across in a way that makes me calm down, and I think that's the most important

thing during competitions […]. I would say that it isn't necessarily what he says, but how he says it and when he says it that means I don't get stressed out."

We've seen the coach describe how he consciously uses training sessions to develop and drill his "communication chart" for competitions, and here you can see the impact of that work from the athlete's perspective. It also helps to illuminate the earlier comments about their extensive work on developing a coordinated approach, as what the athlete says here about what the coach needs to know in order to get the best out of him reveals that he has quite detailed requirements. It isn't just the content of what the coach says to him that is important, it is also how he says it, and the timing of when he says it. Meeting these needs of the athlete requires a finely tuned and nuanced understanding of both the athlete and the situation, and the coach demonstrates that he does indeed have that, which makes him the athlete's most important tool for getting calm enough to maximise his chances of performing well.

However, if you look at the coach's description of his interaction with Athlete 2 in competition situations, he doesn't appear to be aware of his importance in helping the athlete to stay calm enough to perform to the best of his ability. According to the coach, calmness is one of Athlete 2's inherent qualities, rather than something he provides as a coach:

C: "Athlete 2, he's a bit calmer than she is, so he is very receptive and calms down more easily, it's more a case of 'this will be fine, A', 'that's not working, let's forget about it', and 'we should do this and that, do you agree?'. He responds 'yes, I agree', and repeats the plan, and then he goes out and gets on with it, basically."

For the athletes to be receptive to his performance-enhancing feedback, they must be calm (enough), and the coach needs to work harder on that with Athlete 1 than with Athlete 2. The fact that Athlete 2 calms down more easily makes the dialogue smoother. As a coach, he doesn't need any extra strategies to get the athlete sufficiently calm to be receptive to the performance-enhancing message. In other words, there is a shorter route between the message he conveys to the athlete and the message the athlete actually receives, understands and uses as a basis for his actions during the rest of the competition.

When the going gets (really) tough

The great majority of elite athletes will be familiar with experiencing setbacks or negative situations. Athlete 2 also experienced that during his career. At a purely practical level, it was a sport-specific incident during a competition. However, it is interesting to note that his experience of this incident also had a decisive impact on his relationship with his coach, whose sensitive and empathic understanding of him was absolutely vital to the athlete:

Q: "If we can go back to that setback in xxxxxx [name of country] and the time immediately after that, you said in the interview that it was important how C met you straight after what had happened."

Athlete 2: "Yes. I feel it's a perfect example, because there are so many stupid things you can do, because I had developed that pride and self-confidence of a world champion. It got ground down into the dirt, didn't it, I wasn't physically hurt, or anything like that, but my heart was hurting, and he saw that […]. There are so many things you could say, but you just sat down and kind of mirrored me, and I said to you "d…, that was a nightmare", and I wanted you to be there, it was a big help that you were there, it was good to have you there, but you didn't need to say anything, and you definitely didn't need to start with that whole 'just look at it positively' spiel, it wasn't

the moment for that, really. But you know me well and you wanted to sit there and

show that you were there for me; that's the first important thing. The second one is

that you just showed your sympathy and mirrored my feelings, in a way, so that was a

really good way to deal with it from my point of view. Maybe you've been in similar

situations with other people as well?"

C: "I've been in that kind of situation myself, I've experienced it myself […] and then

you try to put yourself into that scenario, how you felt; I also had people around me

who just were there and didn't say much, and that felt like it was enough at that point

in time."

This clearly demonstrates the importance of the coach's interpersonal skills. It was a

specific, sport-related incident that caused the athlete's reaction and negative thoughts and

feelings, but what the athlete describes happening afterwards is about interpersonal

relationships. What mattered to the athlete was the coach's ability to show empathy and

demonstrate that he cared about him as a person. Not saying anything is also a form of

communication, and in this case the most important thing the coach did was to show the

athlete that he actually understood how much this incident meant to him. You could say that

they maintained a dialogue between them where words were superfluous to convey the

message.

Discussion

Overall, the results of this study show that verbal and non-verbal communication were

aspects of the relationship that were important to the coach and both athletes. In both dyads,

the coach and athlete had repeatedly experienced the importance of the communication

process in developing and maintaining their good relationship, as well as its performance-enhancing effect. Moreover, there proved to be a close correlation between how the coach viewed of his own training philosophy of caring about each individual athlete as a person – involving tools such as seeing things from their perspective, empathy, conversation and observation and analysis of body language – and how he implemented his coaching in practice and how the athletes experienced it. In addition, a recurring theme was the coach's ability to correctly interpret the athletes' real needs in different situations. This precise understanding was a result of his investment in establishing and maintaining meaningful dialogue with the athletes, listening to them and also actively observing and analysing their body language. The athletes' feeling of really being seen, understood and respected by the coach meant that they had a great deal of trust in his judgements, suggestions and feedback. This confidence and trust in the coach having their best interests at heart also meant that in certain circumstances they placed more trust in the coach than in themselves, and they were willing and happy for him to take certain decisions on their behalf.

The perceived importance of communication meant that the communication process was an aspect of performance they worked systematically to improve in the build-up to competitions. The aim was to ingrain good communicative interaction in the same way as the sport-specific skills. In conjunction with this, it was natural for the coach to take personal responsibility for adjusting and adapting his communication style in such a way as to meet the needs of the athletes. The coach's ability to adapt and actually meet the athlete's perceived needs was something specifically mentioned by the athletes. This corresponds with previous findings that SWCs are particularly good at exercising flexibility in order to meet athletes' requirements, as they have an excellent understanding of how their actions affect other people (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016).

Competition situations bring to the fore the value of the coach's conscious work during day-to-day training to develop, adjust and ingrain his communication with the individual athlete, reflecting his recognition of the athlete as an individual with important needs that he is responsible for meeting. Athlete 1 and Athlete 2 had different personalities and different needs, so the way in which the coach approached and communicated with them was different, revealing his ability to adjust both his verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as to draw accurate conclusions about the athletes' thoughts and feelings by observing and analysing their body language.

The training environment is perhaps primarily where the collaborative partnership between the coach and athlete develops. The quality of personal interaction during training will probably have a direct influence on the effectiveness of the athlete's training and his/her future development (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013). One element that is considered absolutely vital to effective/successful social interaction is what is called empathic accuracy. Empathic accuracy is about "the accuracy of ongoing moment-to-moment inferences regarding the psychological state of another individual" (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013, p. 325). In other words, it is the ability to sense/comprehend another person's ever-changing thoughts, feelings and intentions in ongoing situations.

One of the key, recurring observations of this study is the coach's empathic accuracy in terms of understanding the athletes' thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, his empathic accuracy helps to inform how he should approach the athletes in order to live up to their expectations and requirements of him as a coach. According to Becker (2009), athletes' expectations of their coach and the ability of the coach to live up to them play a key role both in the development of the coach-athlete relationship and its outcomes.

An underlying factor that affects empathic accuracy is the degree to which the people involved are motivated to actually reach accurate conclusions about their partner's thoughts

and feelings (Thomas & Fletcher, 1997). A high level of motivation to achieve empathic accuracy in a relationship is particularly seen when the parties believe that a lot is at stake. This may, for example, be in relationships where a high degree of mutual dependence develops over time, or where the parties want to achieve something that is very important to them (Bissonnette, Rusbult, & Kilpatrick, 1997). In the same way as with other dyadic relationships, the coach-athlete relationships in this study were established because together the parties wanted to achieve something that they couldn't achieve alone, indicating a high degree of mutual dependence. Both dyads were also maintained over an extended period. The coach's coaching philosophy and his ability to put it into practice, as well as the athletes' emphasis on how important their relationship with the coach was to them, indicate that there was probably a high level of motivation to achieve empathic accuracy. Moreover, the dyads in this study wanted to achieve something that was highly important to them, namely world-class performances, which is likely to further increase their motivation levels. One study also shows that there is a link between empathic accuracy and how positively coaches and athletes rate their relationship and how satisfied they are with their training. This suggests that greater empathic accuracy contributes to positive outcomes of the relationship and thus promotes more effective and successful coach-athlete relationships (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009). In addition, the coach in this study pointed out that increasing the quality of interaction also helped to build an enormous degree of trust between them.

In order to increase empathic accuracy, it is recommended that the coach and athlete work proactively to develop a shared understanding of each other by exploring different ways of communicating (Lorimer & Jowett, 2013), which was something that the objects of this study did. It was evident that the interpersonal relationship and developing a shared understanding of each other was of vital importance to the coach and athlete in both coach-athlete dyads, and their most important tool for achieving that mutual understanding was the

communication process between them. Communication is the process by which a coach and athlete exchange information (LaVoi, 2007), and truly acknowledging the power of effective communication in terms of influencing thoughts, feelings, attitudes and hence performances is a key aspect of successful coaching (Cherubini, 2019).

In coaching, the communication process can best be described as being dynamic, mutual and complex, and it is often dependent on the continuous interplay between content and context (Cherubini, 2019). As well as there being a variety of forms of communication, such as written, oral, non-verbal and visual, communication also takes place in a variety of different contexts, such as one-to-one, in small groups and with the whole team present. It is clear that the coach in this study understood the complexity and dynamics of the communication process and was comfortable using the various forms of communication. In order to increase his understanding of the athletes, as well as to keep this knowledge up to date, he showed the athletes in day-to-day training that he was genuinely interested in them, for example by initiating dialogue. He also believed in looking each individual athlete in the eyes, while continuously observing and analysing their body language, and if he felt that something wasn't right or that something was bothering the athlete, he initiated a conversation to see whether it was possible to find a practical solution to the thing upsetting/bothering them. As well as having the communication skills needed to adapt his use of the various forms of communication to the situation and his reading of the athlete, it is also apparent he understood that communication was a mutual process where he was both a transmitter and recipient of information. He had also realised and experienced that it was valuable to listen to his athletes, both to what they said to him verbally and to the information conveyed by their non-verbal communication (Cherubini, 2019). Active listening has for a long time been recognised as one of the most important skills for improving communication processes, as it helps to avoid misunderstandings and helps coaches to reach more accurate conclusions and

understand their athletes better (Cherubini, 2019; Yukelson, 2015). For a coach, actively listening involves interacting closely with the athlete by noticing their body language, being attentive in conversations and summarising and clarifying anything that appears unclear in the interaction (Cherubini, 2019). The coach in this study showed genuine interest in the lives of his athletes outside the sport, took on board and showed respect for their points of view, and where necessary implemented practical measures in training to look after the athletes and reduce their overall stress levels. As well as affecting the athletes' perception that the coach cares about them as whole people, and promoting empathic accuracy, this can also be an important tool in maintaining the quality of training and performance, as research shows that athletes who subjectively report more psychological stress prior to training take longer to recover straight after training than the ones who report low levels of stress before training (Stults-Kolehmainen & Bartholomew, 2012).

In order to improve empathic accuracy, it is also recommended to give time and opportunity for conversations and social interaction between the coach and athlete by extending training sessions, by the coach being available before and after training or by reducing what needs to be covered during training sessions (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009). The coach in this study did those kinds of things, and he used the communication between him and the athletes to establish what could be seen as the foundations for empathic accuracy, as it was during training sessions that the coach and athletes got to know each other well and had the time and opportunity to develop a fundamental understanding of each other.

In the lead up to important competitions, the personal interaction and fine-tuning of the communication process was more specifically geared towards enhancing the athletes' performance. In many ways, the aim of the specific work that the coach and Athlete 2 performed in training to improve and ingrain the interaction between them is to develop a high level of empathic accuracy. This helped to reduce potential disruptions to their

relationship in the shape of miscommunication or misunderstandings, which in turn meant that they could focus all of their energy on performance in the emotionally charged atmosphere of a competition. The constant emotional fluctuations that take place in competitive sport are a key element of the communication process (Yukelson, 2015). When information is transmitted and received in an emotionally charged atmosphere, it is important to acknowledge the existence of the emotion, and to accept and appropriately channel its strength (Breakey, Jones, Cunningham, & Holt, 2009). Given that communication between the coach and athlete is a mutual process, this applies to the emotions of both the coach and athlete, as emotions will affect how a message is communicated, received and interpreted (Yukelson, 2015).

The coach in this study was also accurate in his interpretation of the athletes' thoughts and feelings in situations that are particularly emotionally charged for the athletes. This was true of his relationships with both Athlete 2 and Athlete 1, but the way in which he chose to communicate with them in order to improve their performances was different. However, in both cases the coach's use of non-verbal communication played a key role. According to Anshel (2012), the ability of coaches to understand the impact of their non-verbal communication should not be underestimated. Body language such as head and hand movements, posture, eye contact and facial expressions is often more powerful than verbal communication in terms of expressing the intensity of feelings, locus of attention and sincerity of emotions. Moreover, the volume, tone and pitch of one's voice can influence how effective communication is, as these forms of non-verbal communication are often signs of underlying emotions (Anshel, 2012).

The most important thing for Athlete 2 was that the coach helped him to stay calm. This is precisely what the coach did, and it was particularly his non-verbal communication that played a key role in Athlete 2 achieving the appropriate emotional state. It was above all

the coach's comportment in terms of his attitude, eye contact and facial expressions that gave Athlete 2 the necessary sense of calm, but in so far as the coach said anything, his tone and the volume of his voice were more important than the content. These were the communication channels by which the coach managed to convey what was probably an underlying sense of calm and confidence in the athlete having the ability and skills needed to master the competition situation he was facing. In the interaction between the coach and athlete after what had been a very painful experience for Athlete 2, the importance of the coach's non-verbal communication was also evident. Not only did the coach reach an empathically accurate interpretation of the athlete's thoughts and feelings, he also mainly used body language very successfully to covey the sincerity of his emotions to the athlete. The impact of the way in which the coach interacted with the athlete in this situation is also consistent with previous research arguing that the ability of a coach to respond positively to athletes who have experienced an unwanted or negative situation (e.g. being reassuring, relaxed, calm, supportive) may have a positive influence on the future interaction between the coach and athlete (Sagar & Jowett, 2012).

In the interaction with Athlete 1 in a competition situation, it was primarily the tone and pitch of the coach's voice which ensured that the message he wanted to convey was received and interpreted in accordance with his intentions, and thus meant that she redirected her focus to the areas that would improve her performance. This is recognised as a form of non-verbal communication that can influence the effectiveness of communication and your ability to get your message across (Cherubini, 2019).

Conclusion

This study has offered detailed insight into the significance of communication in two coach-athlete dyads, and into the value of communication between the coach and athlete

towards improving both the quality of relationships and performances in the context of world-class sport. The study has also provided important information about the amount of time and effort the dyads put into ensuring that the communication process itself was of high quality. The concept of empathic accuracy and research relating to communication provided sound theoretical frameworks for understanding the personal interactions within these two dyads.

There has not been much research into the significance of different communication strategies within the coach-athlete relationship or research that has explored which mechanisms can help us to understand the link between the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and important outcomes in terms of both performance and well-being (Davis et al., 2019). With this in mind, we consider that the detailed insights of this study provide an important perspective for shedding light on the communication process and its significance in two coach-athlete dyads that have consistently produced world-class performances. The dynamic between communication and empathic accuracy is perhaps of particular interest: it appears that the communication process within the dyad increased empathic accuracy, and that empathic accuracy improved the quality of subsequent communication, in a process that the coach and both athletes considered of key importance to the quality of their relationships and their performances.

One of the strengths of this study is its use of a multiperspectival IPA design, which helps to give a more detailed and complete understanding of the complex dynamics of the personal interaction that takes place and develops in the relationship between a coach and an athlete. This type of dyadic design meant that the study combined the strong idiographic focus that is characteristic of traditional IPA with an analysis of interpersonal relationships (Larkin et al., 2019).

This study may offer important, relevant insights to coaches, athletes, sports psychologists and support staff who want to learn more about how they can use

communication to increase the quality of their relationships and improve performances.
However, an idiographic study like this with few respondents cannot claim to offer a
definitive answer as to what are the best communication strategies and channels for improving
empathic accuracy, relationship quality and performances in coach-athlete relationships at
world-class level. Other studies will probably shed light on additional factors that may affect
and be affected by the communication process, and thus provide further insights and nuances
in relation to the coach-athlete relationship. These factors could, for example, include the
personalities of the coach and athlete, the training philosophy, the nature of the sport, the
length and history of the relationship and the performance level.

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APPENDIX I

Study information and consent forms from all studies

Kjære

Idrettsprestasjoner på høyt nivå er noe som har fascinert mennesker gjennom alle tider, og utøvere som makter å gjenskape prestasjoner over tid, er spesielt. På grunn av dine tidligere toppidrettsprestasjoner får du denne forespørselen om deltagelse i doktorgradsprosjektet, Mester-debrief. Formålet med prosjektet er å opparbeide oss kunnskap om det vi anser som sentrale psykologiske faktorer og ferdigheter som kjennetegner utøvere som presterer på høyt nivå over tid.

Deltagelse i prosjektet innebærer at du medvirker i et intervju som varer i om lag to timer, hvor vi ser på temaer rundt mentale utfordringer og forberedelser i forhold til å prestere – vi kommer inn på det å takle stress, opprettholde motivasjon, betydning av sosiale relasjoner m.m. Det er selvfølgelig frivillig å delta, og du kan trekke deg fra prosjektet når du måtte ønske det. Intervjuet vil bli tatt opp på lydbånd, dette for å sikre best mulig grunnlag for våre videre undersøkelser.

Vi vil sammenfatte det som kommer ut av intervjuet og du vil få lest igjennom og kommentert alt før noe blir publisert. Det er kun min veileder, Anne Marte Pensgaard, og jeg som vil få tilgang til de personidentifiserbare opplysningene. Vi er begge underlagt taushetsplikt og opplysningene vil bli behandlet strengt konfidensielt. Da du har vært en kjent idrettsutøver så er det likevel en mulighet for at du vil kunne være indirekte identifiserbar i publiseringer fra prosjektet på bakgrunn av dine prestasjoner. Publisering blir derfor kun gjort med din tillatelse.

Doktorgradsprosjektet forventes å være ferdig i 2013. Det er likevel ønskelig å beholde dataene etter at prosjektet er avsluttet frem til utgangen av 2018, da det er mulig at det blir aktuelt med en oppfølgingsstudie i etterkant. Om dette så blir tilfelle så vil du igjen motta informasjon og forespørsel om deltakelse og benyttelse av det allerede innhentede datamaterialet. Dersom det ikke er ønskelig at datamaterialet skal lagres vil dette bli slettet ved prosjektslutt i 2013.

Dersom du ønsker å delta i dette prosjektet, er det fint om du signerer vedlagte samtykkeerklæring og returnerer den i den frankerte konvolutten så snart som mulig. Har du spørsmål om prosjektet, kan du kontakte meg på adressen eller på telefonnummeret under eller veileder for prosjektet Anne Marte Pensgaard på e-postadressen eller telefonnummeret under.

Norges idrettshøgskole er ansvarlig for dette prosjektet, samtidig som det er Adecco og Norges idrettsforbund og olympiske og paralympiske komité som finansierer prosjektet. Prosjektet er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskaplig datatjeneste A/S.

Vennlig hilsen

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Vi vil sammenfatte det som kommer ut av intervjuet og du vil få lest igjennom og kommentert alt før noe blir publisert. Det er kun min veileder, Anne Marte Pensgaard, og jeg som vil få tilgang til de personidentifiserbare opplysningene. Vi er begge underlagt taushetsplikt og opplysningene vil bli behandlet strengt konfidensielt. Da du er eller har vært trener for kjente idrettsutøvere så er det likevel en mulighet for at du vil kunne være indirekte identifiserbar i publiseringer fra prosjektet på bakgrunn av dine meritter. Publisering blir derfor kun gjort med din tillatelse.

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Dersom du ønsker å delta i dette prosjektet, er det fint om du signerer vedlagte samtykkeerklæring og returnerer den i den frankerte konvolutten så snart som mulig. Har du spørsmål om prosjektet, kan du kontakte meg på adressen eller på telefonnummeret under eller veileder for prosjektet Anne Marte Pensgaard på e-postadressen eller telefonnummeret under.

Norges idrettshøgskole er ansvarlig for dette prosjektet, samtidig som det er Adecco og Norges idrettsforbund og olympiske og paralympiske komité som finansierer prosjektet. Prosjektet er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskaplig datatjeneste A/S.

Vennlig hilsen

Doktorgradsstipendiat:
Anne Fylling Frøyen
v/ Norges idrettshøgskole og Olympiatoppen
Pb. 4003
Ullevål Stadion
0608 Oslo
Anne.f.froyen@olympiatoppen.no
+47 419 00 354

Veileder:
Anne Marte Pensgaard
Norges idrettshøgskole og Olympiatoppen
Am.pensgaard@olympiatoppen.no

SAMTYKKE ERKLÆRING

Jeg har lest all informasjon om prosjektet og bekrefter herved at jeg ønsker å delta i "Mester-debrief" prosjektet slik det er beskrevet_____ (sett kryss)

Jeg er informert om at jeg når som helst kan trekke meg fra prosjektet uten grunn.

Signatur: ……………………………………

Svaret kan sendes tilbake i ferdig frankert konvolutt, eller du kan respondere per e-post dersom det skulle passe bedre for deg. Svaret kan da sendes til
Anne.f.froyen@olympiatoppen.no

Har du spørsmål eller trenger ytterligere informasjon er du velkommen til å ta kontakt på telefonnummer 419 00 354 (Anne Fylling Frøyen) eller 419 00 365 (Anne Marte Pensgaard)

På forhånd takk!

Mvh

Anne Fylling Frøyen   Anne Marte Pensgaard, Dr Scient
Doktorgrads stipendiat   Veileder

Kjære

Idrettsprestasjoner på høyt nivå er noe som har fascinert mennesker gjennom alle tider. Norges rangering som ████████████████ og antall mesterskapsmedaljer under din ledelse gjør derfor ditt arbeid som trener både imponerende og interessant for andre å lære av.

På bakgrunn av din suksess som ████████████████████████ ████████████████ ønsker vi å invitere dere til å delta i doktorgradsprosjektet Mester-debrief. Formålet med denne studien er å opparbeide oss mer kunnskap om hvordan trener og utøver påvirker hverandre og hvordan dette gjensidige samspillet bidrar til prestasjon. Da vi vet at små nyanser kan utgjøre en stor forskjell i eliteidretten og at trenere ofte jobber ulikt med ulike utøvere for å få frem det beste i dem så ønsker vi å inkludere både ████████ og ████████████████ i studien. På bakgrunn av dette har de også mottatt en invitasjon til å delta i prosjektet.

Deltagelse i prosjektet innebærer at du medvirker i til sammen tre intervjuer som hver varer i om lag en time. Det første intervjuet gjennomføres med deg alene, mens intervju nummer to og tre gjennomføres sammen med hver av utøverne. Tema for intervjuene vil være dine tanker om hva som kjennetegner en god relasjon mellom trener og utøver og hvordan du arbeider med den enkelte utøver for at denne utøveren skal prestere best mulig både i treningssituasjon og i konkurransesituasjon. Det er ønskelig at intervjuene gjennomføres i januar/februar 2012, men dersom dette tidsrommet ikke passer for deg/dere er det mulighet for å forskyve dette noe. Det er selvfølgelig frivillig å delta, og du kan trekke deg fra prosjektet når du måtte ønske det. Intervjuet blir tatt opp på lydbånd, dette for å sikre best mulig grunnlag for våre videre undersøkelser. Samtidig ønsker vi å gjøre videoopptak av de samtalene hvor både du og den enkelte utøver er tilstede. Dersom du/dere ønsker å være med på prosjektet, men ikke ønsker at det skal gjøre videoopptak av deres felles samtaler så er det selvfølgelig helt i orden. Du/dere krysser da bare av for dette alternativet i samtykkeerklæringen.

Både når det gjelder lydopptakene og eventuelle videoopptak så skal disse kun benyttes av min veileder, Anne Marte Pensgaard, og meg selv i vårt videre analysearbeid. Vi er begge underlagt taushetsplikt og opplysningene vil behandles strengt konfidensielt. Vi vil sammenfatte det som kommer ut av intervjuene og du vil få lest gjennom og kommentert alt før noe blir publisert. Det er kun min veileder og jeg som vil få tilgang til de personidentifiserbare opplysningene. Da du er en kjent trener så er det likevel en mulighet for at du vil kunne være indirekte identifiserbar i publiseringer fra prosjektet på bakgrunn av dine prestasjoner. Publisering vil derfor kun bli gjort med din tillatelse.

Doktorgradsprosjektet forventes å være ferdig i 2013. Det er likevel ønskelig å beholde dataene etter at prosjektet er avsluttet frem til utgangen av 2018, da det er mulig at det blir aktuelt med en oppfølgingsstudie i etterkant. Om dette så blir tilfelle så vil du igjen motta

informasjon og forespørsel om deltakelse og benyttelse av det allerede innhentede datamaterialet. Dersom det ikke er ønskelig at datamaterialet skal lagres vil dette bli slettet ved prosjektslutt i 2013.

Dersom du ønsker å delta i prosjektet er det fint om du svarer på denne e-posten så raskt som mulig. Har du spørsmål om prosjektet, kan du kontakte meg på adressen eller på telefonnummeret under eller veileder for prosjektet Anne Marte Pensgaard på e-postadressen eller telefonnummeret under.

Norges idrettshøgskole er ansvarlig for dette prosjektet, samtidig som det er Adecco og Norges idrettsforbund og olympiske og paralympiske komité som finansierer prosjektet. Prosjektet er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste A/S.

Vennlig hilsen

Doktorgradsstipendiat:
Anne Fylling Frøyen
v/ Norges idrettshøgskole og Olympiatoppen
Pb. 4003
Ullevål Stadion
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Anne.f.froyen@olympiatoppen.no
+47 419 00 354

Veileder:
Anne Marte Pensgaard
Norges idrettshøgskole og Olympiatoppen
Am.pensgaard@olympiatoppen.no

Kjære

Idrettsprestasjoner på høyt nivå er noe som har fascinert mennesker gjennom alle tider. Norges rangering som ███████████████ og ditt bidrag til dette under ledelse av ██████ ██████ er både imponerende og interessant for andre å lære av. Vi ønsker derfor å invitere dere til å delta i doktorgradsprosjektet Mester-debrief. Formålet med denne studien er å opparbeide oss mer kunnskap om hvordan trener og utøver arbeider sammen og hvordan dette gjensidige samspillet bidrar til prestasjon.

Deltagelse i prosjektet innebærer at du medvirker i to intervjuer som hver varer i om lag en time. Det første intervjuet gjennomføres med deg alene, mens intervju nummer to gjennomføres sammen med ██████. Tema for intervjuene vil være dine tanker om hva som kjennetegner en god relasjon mellom trener og utøver og hvordan du alene og i samarbeid med trener arbeider for at du skal prestere best mulig både i treningssituasjon og i konkurransesituasjon. Det er ønskelig at intervjuene gjennomføres i januar/februar 2012, men dersom dette tidsrommet ikke passer for deg/dere er det mulighet for å forskyve dette noe. Det er selvfølgelig frivillig å delta, og du kan trekke deg fra prosjektet når du måtte ønske det. Intervjuet blir tatt opp på lydbånd, dette for å sikre best mulig grunnlag for våre videre undersøkelser. Samtidig ønsker vi å gjøre videoopptak av de samtalene hvor både du og den enkelte trener er tilstede. Dersom du/dere ønsker å være med på prosjektet, men ikke ønsker at det skal gjøre videoopptak av deres felles samtaler så er det selvfølgelig helt i orden. Du/dere krysser da bare av for dette alternativet i samtykkeerklæringen.

Både når det gjelder lydopptakene og eventuelle videoopptak så skal disse kun benyttes av min veileder, Anne Marte Pensgaard, og meg selv i vårt videre analysearbeid. Vi er begge underlagt taushetsplikt og opplysningene vil behandles strengt konfidensielt. Vi vil sammenfatte det som kommer ut av intervjuene og du vil få lest gjennom og kommentert alt før noe blir publisert. Det er kun min veileder og jeg som vil få tilgang til de personidentifiserbare opplysningene. Da du er en kjent trener så er det likevel en mulighet for at du vil kunne være indirekte identifiserbar i publiseringer fra prosjektet på bakgrunn av dine prestasjoner. Publisering vil derfor kun bli gjort med din tillatelse.

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Norges idrettshøgskole er ansvarlig for dette prosjektet, samtidig som det er Adecco og Norges idrettsforbund og olympiske og paralympiske komité som finansierer prosjektet. Prosjektet er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste A/S.

Vennlig hilsen

Doktorgradsstipendiat:
Anne Fylling Frøyen
v/ Norges idrettshøgskole og Olympiatoppen
Pb. 4003
Ullevål Stadion
0608 Oslo
Anne.f.froyen@olympiatoppen.no
+47 419 00 354

Veileder:
Anne Marte Pensgaard
Norges idrettshøgskole og Olympiatoppen
Am.pensgaard@olympiatoppen.no

MESTER-DEBRIEF SAMTYKKEERKLÆRING

Jeg _____(navn) har lest all informasjon om prosjektet og bekrefter herved

at jeg ønsker å delta i "Mester-debrief" prosjektet slik det er beskrevet_____ (sett kryss)

Jeg tillater at det gjøres videoopptak av samtalen: Ja_____ Nei _____(sett kryss)

Jeg er informert om at jeg når som helst kan trekke meg fra prosjektet uten grunn.

Signatur: …………………………………

Svaret kan sendes tilbake i ferdig frankert konvolutt, eller du kan respondere per e-post
dersom det skulle passe bedre for deg. Svaret kan da sendes til
Anne.f.froyen@olympiatoppen.no

Har du spørsmål eller trenger ytterligere informasjon er du velkommen til å ta kontakt på
telefonnummer 419 00 354 (Anne Fylling Frøyen) eller 419 00 365 (Anne Marte Pensgaard)

På forhånd takk!

Mvh

Anne Fylling Frøyen   Anne Marte Pensgaard, Dr Scient
Doktorgrads stipendiat   Veileder

APPENDIX II

Approval from Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

Anne Fylling Frøyen
Seksjon for coaching og psykologi
Norges idrettshøgskole
Postboks 4014 Ullevål Stadion
0806 OSLO

Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Vår dato: 25.01.2010   Vår ref: 23302 / 2 / GRH   Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILRÅDING AV BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 22.12.2009. All nødvendig informasjon om prosjektet forelå i sin helhet 21.01.2010. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

23302	*Mester de-brief*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*Norges idrettshøgskole, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Anne Fylling Frøyen*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, vedlagte prosjektvurdering - kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.12.2013, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen
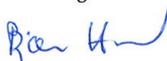
Bjørn Henrichsen   Grethe Halvorsen

Kontaktperson: Grethe Halvorsen tlf: 55 58 25 83
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Avdelingskontorer / *District Offices:*
OSLO: NSD. Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no
TRONDHEIM: NSD. Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no
TROMSØ: NSD. SVF, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. nsdmaa@sv.uit.no

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Det tas høyde for at det behandles sensitive personopplysninger om informantene i form av opplysninger om helseforhold (jf. Pol § 2 nr. 8 c)).

Utvalget består av tidligere toppidrettsutøvere samt trenere, tilsammen rundt 15 personer. Utøverne og trenerne har ikke nødvendigvis noe med hverandre å gjøre. Utvalget informeres skriftlig om prosjektet, inkludert at de kan være indirekte identifiserbare i publikasjoner fra prosjektet, og samtykker skriftlig til deltakelse, jf. informasjonsskriv og samtykkeerklæring mottatt 21. januar 2010.

Vi forutsetter at informasjonsskrivene til utvalget tilføyes informasjon om at dersom de trekker seg fra studien vil lydbånd bli slettet og øvrige opplysninger anonymisert.

Opplysningene samles inn gjennom individuelle intervju.

Prosjektslutt er angitt til 31. desember 2013. Etter prosjektslutt oppbevares data i rundt 5 år til 31. desember 2018 for eventuell bruk i en oppfølgingsstudie. Med mindre utvalget informeres om noe annet, slettes lydopptak/lydfiler og øvrige data anonymiseres i 2018.

Vi minner om at dersom opplysningene skal brukes i nye oppfølgingsprosjekt, sendes melding om dette til personvernombudet for behandling før prosjektene settes i gang.

Anne Fylling Frøyen
Seksjon for coaching og psykologi
Norges idrettshøgskole
Postboks 4014 Ullevål Stadion
0806 OSLO

Vår dato: 20.01.2011   Vår ref: 23302 IB/LR   Deres dato: Deres ref:

REGISTRERING AV ENDRINGER

Vi viser til endringsmelding mottatt 06.12.2010, samt påfølgende korrespondanse, vedrørende prosjektet:

23302   Mester de-brief

Personvernombudet har nå registrert at det skal gjennomføres ny datainnsamling, i tillegg til den som tidligere er innmeldt. Formålet med innhenting av nye data er å opparbeide mer kunnskap og innsikt i hvordan trener og utøver på egenhånd og i fellesskap forbereder seg mot OL. Dette vil være i tråd med prosjektets hovedformål, som er å opparbeide kunnskap om det som anses som sentrale psykologiske faktorer og ferdigheter som kjennetegner utøvere som presterer på høyt nivå over tid, og hvordan trenere arbeider for å utvikle disse (jf. tidligere innsendt melding).

Det innhentes skriftlig samtykke fra deltagerne på grunnlag av skriftlig informasjon om prosjektet. Informasjonsskrivene vedlagt endringsmeldingen finnes tilfredsstillende, forutsatt at det i begge skriv presiseres hva hovedformålet med prosjektet er (gjengitt i avsnittet over), og tilføyes at dersom de trekker seg fra studien vil lyd-/videoopptak bli slettet og øvrige opplysninger anonymisert.

Data innhentes ved at man følger to trener/utøver-dyader fra vinteren 2011 og frem til etter OL i London 2012. I løpet av denne perioden vil det bli gjort flere intervjuer med trener og utøver, både individuelt og i fellesskap. Det foretas lydopptak av intervjuene. I tillegg foretas videoopptak av fellesintervjuene, dersom både trener og utøver samtykker til dette.

Det tas høyde for at opplysningene utøver gir om seg selv kan være sensitive (om helseforhold), jf. personopplysningsloven § 2, pkt. 8 c). Ettersom trener og utøver vil uttale seg om hverandre, registreres opplysninger om tredjeperson. Behandlingen av tredjepersonsopplysningene kan hjemles i personopplysningsloven § 8 første alternativ. Det legges til grunn at opplysningene som registreres om tredjeperson ikke er sensitive.

Kun prosjektleder og veileder vil ha tilgang til opptak og personopplysninger i prosjektperioden. Ved publisering vil deltagerne kunne identifiseres indirekte, ettersom de er kjente utøvere og trenere. Det skal innhentes eksplisitt samtykke til publisering av personopplysninger fra den enkelte informant på

Avdelingskontorer / *District Offices:*
OSLO: NSD. Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no
TRONDHEIM: NSD. Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no
TROMSØ: NSD. HSL, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. martin-arne.andersen@uit.no

bakgrunn av informasjonsskrivet, og ved at informanten får anledning til å lese igjennom avsnittene om seg selv og godkjenne disse før publisering.

Prosjektslutt er angitt til 31.12.2013. Etter prosjektslutt oppbevares data frem til 31.12.2018 for eventuell bruk i en oppfølgingsstudie. Lyd-/videoopptak slettes og øvrige data anonymiseres innen utgangen av 2018, med mindre utvalget informeres om noe annet. Dersom opplysningene skal brukes i nye oppfølgingsprosjekt, minner vi om at det skal sendes melding om dette til personvernombudet i god tid før prosjektene igangsettes.

Det legges til grunn at prosjektopplegget for øvrig gjennomføres i tråd med tidligere innsendt melding og personvernombudets tilrådning.

Ta gjerne kontakt dersom noe er uklart.

Vennlig hilsen

Bjørn Henrichsen   Inga Brautaset

Kontaktperson: Inga Brautaset tlf: 55 58 26 35

NSD NORSK SENTER FOR FORSKNINGSDATA

NSD sin vurdering

Prosjekttittel

Mester de-brief

Referansenummer

749693

Registrert

07.08.2018 av Anne F. Frøyen - ff.anne@gmail.com

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Norges idrettshøgskole / Institutt for idrett og samfunnsvitenskap

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Anne Fylling Frøyen, a.f.froyen@nih.no, tlf: 41900354

Type prosjekt

Forskerprosjekt

Prosjektperiode

01.04.2010 - 31.12.2020

Status

27.09.2018 - Vurdert

Vurdering (1)

27.09.2018 - Vurdert

BAKGRUNN
Behandlingen av personopplysninger ble opprinnelig meldt inn til NSD 22.12.2009 (NSD sin ref: 23302) og vurdert under personopplysningsloven som var gjeldende på det tidspunktet.

07.08.2018 meldte prosjektleder inn en utvidelse av prosjektet. Prosjektet hadde opprinnelig prosjektslutt 31.12.2018 og det søkes nå om utvidelse til 31.12.2020. NSD understreker at ytterligere forlengelse av prosjektslutt ikke kan påregnes uten at det gis ny informasjon til de registrerte.

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 27.09.2018 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan fortsette.

MELD ENDRINGER
Dersom behandlingen av personopplysninger endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved

å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. På våre nettsider informerer vi om hvilke endringer som må meldes. Vent på svar før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET
Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier om helseforhold og alminnelige personopplysninger frem til 31.12.2020.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG
Prosjektet har innhentet samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 a), jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER
NSD finner at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen:
- om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER
De registrerte fikk informasjon om prosjektet da de først ble inkludert i studien. Prosjektleder opplyser om at det vil være uforholdsmessig vanskelig jf. personvernforordningen art. 14 nr. 5 b) å gi de registrerte oppdatert informasjon om forlengelsen av prosjektslutt. Dette er fordi prosjektleder ikke har tilgang på kontaktinformasjon.

De registrerte har likevel følgende rettigheter: innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19) og protest (art 21). Rettighetene etter art. 15-19 og 21 gjelder så lenge den registrerte er mulig å identifisere i datamaterialet.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER
NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32)

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må prosjektansvarlig følge interne retningslinjer/rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET
NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Belinda Gloppen Helle
Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

APPENDIX III

Interview guides

Mester de-brief – temaguide til utøvere (generell mal, rev.til PhD)

Tidlig karriere/bakgrunnsdata:
Hvor gammel var du da du begynte med den idretten?
Hvor gammel var du da du begynte å konkurrere?
Hvor mange timer i uken trente du da du begynte å satse?
Hvordan har treningsmengden utviklet seg over disse årene?
Hvorfor begynte du med akkurat den idretten?
Drev du med flere idretter da du var yngre?
-betydningen av dette senere i karrieren

Idrettslig utvikling:
Kan du huske den første viktige hendelsen i idretten din?
-tanker under/rundt hendelsen (beskriv)
-konsekvenser
-betydning for videre utvikling

Kan du huske din første, for deg, viktige seier?
-reaksjoner
-tanker videre
-betydning for videre utvikling

Kan du huske din første store negative opplevelse i idretten din?
-betydning for videre utvikling
-konsekvenser
-hvordan opplevde du nederlaget (beskriv)

Hvor gammel var du da du bestemte deg for å satse for fullt?

Hvordan opplevde du tiden etter din første store seier?
-økt press på deg som utøver
-trenerens rolle
-betydningen av trenerens støtte
-påvirkning på senere konkurranser – du visste at du hadde gjort det før – positivt/negativt

Hvordan påvirket den idrettslige satsningen andre deler av livet ditt?
-det sosiale
-utdanning

Du som har vært på "innsiden" av norsk toppidrett og norsk toppidrettskultur, kan du beskrive hva som ligger i konteksten eller "toppidrettsverden" for deg?
-norsk toppidrett kontra europeisk toppidrett, internasjonal toppidrett
-noen karakteristika som du er mener er spesielt viktige eller tydelige i toppidretten

Opplever du at toppidretten har forandret seg mye opp gjennom årene?

Hva var grunnen til at du valgte å bli toppidrettsutøver?

Involvering av "viktige andre" og den sosiale relasjonen/sosiale støtten mellom trener og utøver:
Jeg vil gjerne høre litt om de menneskene som var involvert i din idrettskarriere.
-tidligere faser i din karriere?
-egen interesse
-viktigste bidrag

I perioder hvor du hadde store mengder trening og/eller mye reising i forbindelse med idretten, hvordan opplevde du dette i forhold til personer som var viktig for deg utenfor idretten?
-avhengig av relasjon
-grep for at balansegangen mellom arenaer skulle bli best mulig

Hvordan vil du beskrive forholdet/relasjonen din til trenerne du har hatt opp gjennom karrieren?
-hensyn til ulike behov
-ulik i ulike faser/perioder av karrieren

Er det noe du nå i ettertid skulle ønske at de (menneskene rundt deg) ikke hadde gjort?

Prestasjonshjulet:
Da beveger vi oss videre til betydningen av mentale faktorer for prestasjon.

Hvor stor betydning opplever du at mentale faktorer har for at man som utøver skal bli virkelig god?

Har du som utøver vært opptatt av de mentale faktorenes betydning i forhold til dine prestasjoner?

Commitment: Hvordan opplevde og tenkte du i forhold til enhver tid å jobbe mot å bli best mulig?
-forandret dette seg opp gjennom karrieren?

Hvor lang tid brukte du på å forberede deg på OL? (ÅRSTALL)

Focused connection: Hva betyr fokus – konsentrasjon for deg?
-fokus på andre ting enn idrett
-trening
-konkurranser
-ulike arenaer, fokus konsentrasjon

Self-confidence: Hvordan har troen på deg selv endret seg i løpet av årene?

Hva betyr selvtillit for deg?

Hvordan påvirker du din egen selvtillit?

Hvordan snakket du til deg selv?

Hvordan opplevde du situasjoner/hendelser hvor du hadde mindre selvtillit eller følte at du mistet selvtillit som idrettsutøver?
-hva skjedde?
-hvordan taklet du det?
-andre som hjalp deg?

Hvilken betydning opplever du at trenere har når det gjelder å bygge selvtillit til utøvere?

Hvordan har du opplevd det eller følt det at treneren din ikke har hatt tilstrekkelig tro på deg og dine ferdigheter?
-hvordan taklet du det?

Positive images: Brukte du noen gang visualisering?
-hva så du

Distraction control: Hva har vært kilde til forstyrrelser?
-positive/negative
-indre/ytre
-hvordan overkomme dette

Ongoing learning:
Hva har vært den største mentale utfordringen vært for deg i din idrettskarriere?

Hvilken trener har vært særdeles betydningsfull for deg med tanke på mentale faktorer?

Betydningen av trygghet

Opplevelser i OL

Tenk tilbake til hvordan du følte deg like før din viktigste konkurranse i siste OL (nødvendigvis siste OL?) Hvor godt forberedt følte du deg og trodde du at du var, akkurat da?

Hvis du ikke følte deg 100 % klar, hva var det som manglet?

Hvordan kunne du ha forberedt deg annerledes?

Opplevelse av egen prestasjon

Hvordan vurderer du din egen innsats i OL?

Hvilke forventninger hadde du i forkant?
-andres forventninger

Kilder til stress

La meg først definere stress: Jeg referer til negative emosjoner, følelser og tanker. Dette inkluderer frykt, angst, muskelspenninger, nervøsitet, fysiologiske reaksjoner som for eks. sommerfugler i magen, skjelvinger, nervøs svetting. Tanker sentrert omkring bekymringer og tvil på deg selv. Negativ selvprat.

Hvordan reagerte du generelt på stress?

Endret dette seg gjennom karrieren?
-for eks opplevd spenningsnivå som ung utøver sammenlignet med sent i karrieren

Hva opplever du som kilder til stress?
-ulike kilder under ulike konkurranser – OL

Opplevde du noen **positive** uforutsette hendelser i forbindelse med deltakelsen i OL?
(ÅRSTALL)
-i konkurransen
-i forbindelse med arrangementet
-i leiren
-generelt sett

Opplevde du noen **negative** hendelser i forbindelse med deltakelse i OL?
-i konkurransen
-i forbindelse med arrangementet
-i leiren
-generelt sett

Hvordan virket disse hendelsene inn på deg?

Hvordan har du forberedt deg på å takle stressende situasjoner?
-konkurranser
-daglig trening
-støtteapparatet

Motivasjonell orientering
Hva var den viktigste årsaken til at du begynte med den idretten du nå er aktiv i? (hente opp
fra begynnelsen)
-hva fikk deg til å fortsette
-har det alltid vært den samme begrunnelsen til hvorfor du driver med denne idretten
-ulike grunner opp gjennom karrieren

Hva betyr ordet MOTIVASJON for deg?

Hva har motivert deg mest?

SDT/motivasjonelt klima:
Selv om du var individuell utøver, hadde du følelsen av å være en del av et lag?
-egne prestasjoner
-beskriv klimaet/miljøet i laget du var en del av

Hvordan er forskjellen på vennskap med de vennene du har utenfor idretten og de vennskap
du har med venner innad i idretten?

Hvordan ble miljøet i laget påvirket av kravet til (vedvarende) prestasjoner?
-på hvilken måte
-lik/ulik opplevelse i ulike lag
-likt/ulikt på ulike tidspunkt?

Hva mener du er trenerens viktigste jobb?

Hvordan vil du beskrive trenerens rolle i laget?

Hvilket ansvar har utøvere for å gjøre treneren sin god?

Har du opplevd at det var ting innad i laget og/ eller støtteapparat som ikke fungerte optimalt?
-i så fall, hvordan påvirket det deg (prestasjon, stress)
-hvordan håndterte du det for din egen del
-hvordan ble det håndtert for lagets del
-kunne ting vært gjort annerledes

Hvordan har du opplevd at trenere og utøvere kan ha ulike forventninger og/eller krav til en trener-utøverrelasjon i toppidretten?
-konsekvenser
-bevissthet rundt dette

Hvordan opplevde du trenerskifter opp gjennom karrieren?
-ulik opplevelse med ulike trenere?
-for deg og for laget
-opparbeide tillit – hvor lang tid? Hva er viktig?

Hvordan er miljøet når utøvere presterer optimalt?
-hvordan var miljøet i laget du var en del i forhold til denne karateristikken

Hvordan opplevde du at laget ble påvirket av kravet til (vedvarende) prestasjoner?
-på hvilken måte
-lik/ulik opplevelse i ulike lag
-likt/ulikt på ulike tidspunkt?
-hvordan taklet du dette vedvarende prestasjonskravet som er i toppidretten

Kan du beskrive en hendelse eller episode hvor ting i laget og/eller støtteapparatet som ikke fungerte optimalt?
-hvordan påvirket det deg (prestasjon, stress)
-hvordan håndterte du det?
-når du ser tilbake, ville du gjort ting annerledes/hva lærte du av dette?
-kom det noe positivt ut av konflikten som du/dere kunne ta med dere videre?

Hvilken betydning har laget i ulike faser av en karriere?
-junior
-overgangen junior/senior
-etableringsfasen i eliten
-prestasjon på vedvarende høyt nivå

Hvordan reagerte du på å få negative tilbakemeldinger kontra positive tilbakemeldinger fra treneren?

Delaktig i treningsplanlegging og evaluering av treningen?

Hvordan opplevde du laguttak?
-forskjellig i løpet av karrieren
-påvirket det relasjoner utøver-utøver og/eller trener-utøver
-misunnelse

Hvordan opplevde du det når andre på laget gjorde det bedre enn deg eller hadde mer fremgang enn deg?
-motsatt

Hvorfor ble resultatene dine som de ble?

Hva skulle til for at du skulle føle deg som en god utøver?

Hva tror du er den viktigste årsaken til at du hadde en så lang karriere?

Temaguide til PhD prosjektet Mester de-brief – til trenere

Bakgrunnsdata
Hvor lenge har du vært trener?
Har det alltid vært en fulltidsjobb?
I hvilke idretter har du vært trener?
Hvilke nivåer og/eller aldersgrupper har du vært trener for?

Hvorfor begynte du som trener?

Hva fikk deg til å fortsette?
-samme begrunnelse opp gjennom hele karrieren

Hva slags trenerutdannelse har du?
-annen utdannelse

På hvilket nivå trives du best?
-hvorfor

Hva var det som forandret seg mest/den mest markante forandringen da du ble trener på elitenivå?

Du som har vært lenge på "innsiden" av norsk toppidrett og norsk toppidrettskultur, kan du beskrive hva som ligger i konteksten toppidrett eller "toppidrettsverden" for deg?
-norsk toppidrett kontra europeisk toppidrett, internasjonal toppidrett
-noen karakteristika som du er mener er spesielt viktige eller tydelige i toppidretten

Opplever du at toppidretten har forandret seg mye opp gjennom årene?

Har du selv vært utøver?
-betydning – positiv eller negativ

Hva er den største utfordringen med å være trener?

Hva er en treners viktigste oppgave?

Hva er den mest betydningsfulle hendelse for deg som trener?
-hvorfor er den av betydning
-positiv eller negativ
-konsekvenser

Den sosiale relasjonen/sosiale støtten mellom trener og utøver
Ofte er det flere mennesker som er viktige for en utøver opp gjennom karrieren. Hva er din erfaring i forhold til betydningen av ulike relasjoner opp gjennom karrieren til en utøver?
-hvem har størst betydning
-i tilfelle når?
-ulik betydning på ulike nivåer/aldersgrupper?
-foreldre

Hva er det som er viktig med tanke på forholdet mellom deg og din(e) utøver(e)?

-kjenne utøverne godt?
-følelser og behov
-utenfor idretten
-ulikt syn på ulike nivåer?

Hvordan har jobbet for å etablere og videreutvikle relasjonen til utøvere du har hatt ansvar for?

Hvordan har du balansert et eventuelt rolleskille mellom det å være trener og det å være en kompis eller venn?
-hvordan tenker du i forhold til nødvendigheten av dette rolleskille
-konsekvenser dersom det glir over i hverandre
-ulike forventninger/krav til relasjonen mellom dere

Det legges ofte vekt på viktigheten for utøvere å delta på arenaer utenfor idretten, men hvordan balanserte du din deltagelse på andre arenaer, som familie og venner?
-ser tilbake, ville du ha gjort noe annerledes om du fikk muligheten

Prestasjonshjulet
Da beveger vi oss over på betydningen av mentale faktorer i forhold til prestasjon

På hvilken måte har du vært opptatt av de mentale faktorenes betydning i forhold til dine utøvere og deres prestasjoner?

Hvor stor betydning tror du de mentale faktorene har for at en utøver skal bli virkelig god?

Hvor lang tid bruker du på forberedelser til OL?

Hvordan bidrar du som trener i forhold til utøvere i deres rehabiliteringsprosess etter skader?

Focused connection:
Hva betyr fokus – konsentrasjon for deg?

Prioritering med tanke på deltagelse på flere arenaer?
-fokus, konsentrasjon
-egne prioriteringer

Betydningen av trygghet?
-prestasjon
-livstilfredshet
-ditt bidrag

Self-confidence:

Hva betyr selvtillit for deg?
-påvirke egen selvtillit

Hvordan bidro du til/jobbet du for i forhold til å forbedre og opprettholde utøveres selvtillit?

Hvordan bidro utøverne til å bygge din selvtillit?
-bevisst at de kunne bidra/hadde et ansvar i forhold til å gjøre deg god?

Mental Readiness: Hvordan forberedt du deg til konkurranse?
-OL
-for egen del
-sammen med utøver
-ditt bidrag i forhold til utøvers forberedelser
-hvis flere utøvere, hvordan hjelpe den enkelte

Distraction control: Hva har vært kilder til forstyrrelse?
-positive/negative
-indre/ytre

Ongoing learning: (hva drev deg videre)
Hvor dyktig har du vært til å;
Reflektere over hva du har vært god på/mindre god på
Nyttiggjøre deg dine erfaringer i ditt videre arbeid og videre utvikling?

Opplevelser i OL

Tenk tilbake til siste OL, hvor godt forberedt følte du deg og trodde du at du var da?

Hvor godt forberedt følte du at utøverne var?
-hvis ikke 100%, hva manglet

Hvordan kunne du/dere forberedt dere annerledes?

Opplevelse av egen prestasjon:

Hvordan vurderer du din egen innsats i OL?

Hvilke forventninger hadde du til deg selv og til utøverne i forkant?
- andres forventninger til deg og utøverne

Hvordan vil du beskrive din rolle under OL?
-OL kontra andre store konkurranser?

Kilder til stress:

La meg først definere stress: Jeg referer til negative emosjoner, følelser og tanker. Dette inkluderer frykt, angst, muskelspenninger, nervøsitet, fysiologiske reaksjoner som for eks. sommerfugler i magen, skjelvinger, nervøs svetting. Tanker sentrert omkring bekymringer og tvil på deg selv. Negativ selvprat.

Hvordan reagerer du generelt på stress?

Hva er det som kan oppleves som stressende for deg som trener?
-ulike kilder under ulike konkurranser – OL

Hvordan har du forberedt deg på å takle stressende situasjoner?

Hvorfor har du valgt akkurat slike/denne type forberedelser?

Hadde du noe spesielt opplegg i forhold til dine utøvere slik at de på best mulig måte skulle kunne takle stress?
-ulike strategier under OL enn i andre konkurranser
Hva gjør du om dine strategier ikke virker?

Hvordan jobbet du med deg selv for å mestre stress i hverdagen?
-i forhold til utøvere i deres daglige trening

Motivasjonell orientering:

Hva betyr ordet MOTIVASJON for deg?

Hva har motivert deg mest?

SDT/motivasjonelt klima

Selv om utøvere konkurrerer individuelt er det ofte likevel en del av et lag.
Legges det vekt på noen form for lagfølelse eller tilhørighet?

Hva tror du laget betyr for utøvernes prestasjoner?

Hvordan er miljøet når utøvere presterer optimalt?
-hvordan var miljøet i laget du var trener for i forhold til denne karakteristikken

Hvordan opplevde du at laget ble påvirket av kravet til (vedvarende) prestasjoner?
-på hvilken måte
-lik/ulik opplevelse i ulike lag
-likt/ulikt på ulike tidspunkt?
-hvordan taklet du dette vedvarende prestasjonskravet som er i toppidretten

Kan du beskrive en hendelse eller episode hvor ting i laget og/eller støtteapparatet som ikke fungerte optimalt?
-hvordan påvirket det deg (prestasjon, stress)
-hvordan håndterte du det?
-når du ser tilbake, ville du gjort ting annerledes/hva lærte du av dette?
-kom det noe positivt ut av konflikten som du/dere kunne ta med dere videre?

Hvilke er faringer har du gjort deg i forhold til det å komme inn som ny trener på et allerede etablert lag?
-hvor lang opplevde du at "etableringsfasen" var
-hvordan vil du beskrive den fasen?

Hvilken betydning har laget i ulike faser av en karriere?
-junior
-overgangen junior/senior
-etableringsfasen i eliten
-prestasjon på vedvarende høyt nivå

Hva tenker du om *hvordan* du gir tilbakemeldinger til utøverne?
-hvor mange tilbakemeldinger
-ulike typer tilbakemeldinger på ulike nivåer

Treningsplanlegging og evalueringen av den?
-utøvernes delaktighet

Hva mener du kjennetegner/karakteriserer en god trener?
-hvordan vil du plassere deg som trener inn i denne karakteristikken