

A Qualitative Analysis of Motivational Efforts Employed by Elite Lacrosse Coaches

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Abstract

While motivation has long been a topic of intrigue in coaching and sport, it has been subject to little qualitative analysis. Coaches are often regarded as motivators by trade (Hardy, Burke, & Crace, 2005), and there is seemingly a tremendous amount to learn from such expert practitioners. In talking with coaches about how they motivate, one may gain further insight regarding the successful mechanisms they rely on. Through this study, six elite lacrosse coaches were interviewed regarding their motivational tactics. In these interviews the coaches provided like-minded responses that were categorized (i.e., Personal Responsibility, Tools, Transcendence) and further discussed herein. Such information could provide the foundation for further inquiry into the motivational efforts of expert coaches, affording a better understanding of successful motivational tactics.



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“The essence of coaching comes down to teaching and motivating”
(Hardy, Burke, & Crace, 2005, p. 191)

Introduction

Hardy, Burke, and Crace (2005) do not mince words in defining the essence of coaching. While much can be said of what is taught and how one motivates, the notion that there is little more to coaching than teaching and motivating would seem to ring true. Regardless of one’s formal definition of coaching, much of coaching can be reduced to motivation. In addressing this specific subject, the purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore motivational efforts employed by elite lacrosse coaches so as to further articulate existing and practiced motivational methods. Through this article the literature relating to motivation in sport will be reviewed, the impetus for the research reported herein will be further discussed, and the methods and findings of this study will be detailed.

Literature Review

Motivation is a vastly researched topic relating to issues concerning achievement (Ford, 1992; McClelland, 1961), job satisfaction and management (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 2007; Maslow, 1998), human development (Adler, 1927/1998; Frankl, 1946/1984), education (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, Patashnick, & Nolen, 1985), and of course, sport (Duda & Treasure, 2001; Eliot, 2005) among other disciplines. Through sport, a number of motivational theories have been explored. For example, achievement goals (Duda & Hall, 2001; Grant & Dweck, 2003), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Vallerand & Perreault, 1999; Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001), and attribution theory (Biddle, Hanrahan, & Sellars, 2001; Singer & Orbach, 1999) are well-researched motivational constructs. However, in spite of the wealth of insight regarding these constructs, fewer efforts have been made to assess how coaches motivate their athletes. Less attention has been paid to cataloging the specific motivational interventions coaches practice, how they are implemented, and how effective they have proven to be.

In working to further articulate this gap in the literature, let us further explore the research focused on how coaches motivate. Specifically, there are several key research areas comprising this body of knowledge. *Team climate*, *a coach’s words*, the power of *goals* and *vision*, as well as *pre-game speeches* are all motivational tools that have been analyzed in a variety of depths and contexts. Consistent among all of these research areas is the fact that they are motivational efforts coaches actively employ.



Team Climate

The general team climate a coach develops serves as a profound and influential incubator in which athletes will flourish or falter (Ames & Archer, 1988; Cain & Dweck, 1995; Duda, Chi, Newton, Walling, & Catley, 1995; Nicholls, Patashnick, & Bobbit Nolen, 1985). Climates fostering a focus on attaining goals through a sincere and dogged work ethic, the fun in playing a sport, persistence, and patience (i.e., task oriented) seem to also foster individual enjoyment, interest, and increased effort (Newton & Duda, 1999; Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000). In contrast, team climates that emphasize the importance of winning over the journey, punish poor outcomes as opposed to celebrating hard work, and commend natural ability over continued effort (i.e., ego oriented) seem to leave athletes feeling pressured, anxious, and unenthusiastic (Newton & Duda, 1999; Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000).

Coaches play a significant role in developing these climates, and motivating corresponding attitudes and behaviors. In accordance with their research on climate, Smith, Fry, Ethington, and Li (2005) concluded, “athletes’ perceptions of their coaches’ behaviors contribute significantly to their perceptions of the climate” (p. 176). In fact, the team climate a coach develops can even impact the level of aggression among his/her players (Rascale, Coulomb-Cabagno, & Delsarte, 2005). Coaches who scold more while emphasizing victory and innate ability are more likely to promote more aggressive playing styles (Rascale et al., 2005).

What Coaches Say

While the climate a coach develops can motivate and impact a team of athletes, what do coaches say and do to develop such climates? How are coaches talking to athletes in practices, and how are athletes motivated by specific tactics? In one of the most memorable studies related to coaching, Tharp and Gallimore (1976) observed the great John Wooden coach his UCLA team throughout 15 basketball practices. The Wooden study focused on capturing the tactics and techniques of a master coach at work, and organized all of Wooden’s audible utterances into 11 categories (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). In coaching his team, Wooden was found to have used Instructions 50.3% of the time, while the next highest category proved to be Hustles, which only occurred 12% of the time (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). As per the manner in which Tharp and Gallimore (1976) coded the data, Wooden was never observed engaging in pep talks or traditional motivational speeches, and was rarely seen scolding or praising his players. However, it should be re-emphasized that the study was only conducted throughout a series of practices, 6.6% was unseen or heard, and the research was never extended to the locker room, office, bus, or game day (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976).



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While much of the Wooden study focused on the manner in which Wooden taught his players, Tharp and Gallimore's (1976; Gallimore & Tharp, 2004) work also provides insight into Wooden's efforts to inspire and motivate his players through methods that transcend the world of basketball. Tharp and Gallimore (1976) took note of Wooden's desire to go "beyond basketball to work with players on their personal problems and careers" (p. 9). They also included mention of his last pre-game speech: "come out of the game, win or lose, with your head high; only you and your Lord will know, but the only thing that matters is that you really mean it" (Tharp & Gallimore, 1976, p. 21). Additionally, Tharp and Gallimore (1976) make reference to Wooden's well known articulation of one's journey toward success: the "Pyramid of Success" (p. 9). The "Pyramid of Success" is a broad conceptualization of how an individual and team can work toward the achievement of their goals, and extends far beyond Instructions and Hustles (Wooden & Jamison, 1997). The "Pyramid" is a construction of character traits, seemingly motivating athletic efforts in ways tactical and technical instruction could not, and includes categories like Team Spirit, Faith, Confidence, and Competitive Greatness (Wooden & Jamison, 1997). All of these references suggest Wooden's tactics, as well as the lessons he looked to instill in his players, may have extended beyond the practice court, which leaves one wondering if Wooden's motivational efforts and impact extended far beyond those captured in Tharp and Gallimore's (1976; Gallimore & Tharp, 2004) work.

In a similar study conducted with basketball, coaches Jerry Tarkanian, Bloom, Crumpton, and Anderson (1999) found Tactical (29%) and Technical (13.9 %) Instructions, coupled with Hustles (16%) to represent more than 50% of statements recorded during 10 practices observed throughout a season. As per the findings, Tarkanian was seemingly methodical in sticking to tactical and technical instructions related to the game of basketball, and used words of encouragement when practice efforts were presumably less inspiring. While the frequency a master coach relies on instructive words is intriguing, the study employed a method that relied on coding data in accordance with a 12-item coding-sheet that was developed prior to the study and excluded categories related to more emotional talks or inspiring words (Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999). The coding sheet included categories such as Praise/encouragement (13.6%), Scolds (6%), and Humor (1%), yet no examples of actual utterances were included in the study, as Tarkanian's words were not incorporated into the write-up (Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999). Similar to the Wooden study, there were no efforts made to better understand how a coach relates to his players in the locker room after practice, in the huddle before a game, in the office, through letters and phone calls, or in the travel buses and hotel halls.

Vision

While the Tarkanian study (Bloom, Crumpton, & Anderson, 1999) may fail to offer insight into a coach's ability to impact players through a vision or more idealized goals, Bloom (2002) also suggested that "without an explicit plan or vision from the coach, the team is unlikely to excel"



(p. 452). Perhaps the importance and potential impact of a coach's vision is simply too apparent to warrant extensive review, but very little research has examined coaches' visions or the role of vision in athletics.

In one qualitative analysis of two baseball managers, vision was explored in rare depth (Roffman, 1995). Not only was the presence of vision in the managers' leadership styles identified, but their visions were explored, discussed, and examined, proving to share traits of "grandeur", "revolutionary goals", and "transcendence" (Roffman, 1995, p. 90). Two additional studies of a specific team building approach suggested that shared vision among team members is an integral component of team cohesion and unity (Voight & Callaghan, 2001; Yukelson, 1997). Additionally, through Weinberg and McDermott's (2002) comparison of business and sports leaders' perceptions of organizational success, both groups shared the perspective that "the most common way of achieving cohesion ... was the development of a shared vision" (p. 292). While such studies offer valuable insight into vision's potential role in athletics and its possible motivational and inspirational use, they are sparse.

Goals

Although somewhat of a divergence from vision, many more studies have explored the role of goals in sport. It has been widely reported that goals may work to motivate a number of variables ranging from team cohesion to enhanced individual effort (Carron, Hausenblas, & Eys, 2005). Although not focused on the field of sport, Locke and Latham (2002) have suggested that goals influence a number of factors including the direction of effort, persistence, and energy. While Locke and Latham's (2002; 2006; Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981) work has been more general, several studies have worked to confirm their findings in a context specific to physical activity and performance, suggesting that different types of goals (e.g., long- vs. short-term goals, realistic vs. unrealistic goals, and challenging vs. simplistic goals) produce varying motivational effects (Bar-Eli, Hartman, & Levy-Kolker, 1994; Bar-Eli, M., Tenenbaum, G., Pie, J. S., Btsh, Y., & Almog, A., 1997). Similarly, one recent research article indicates that goals associated with the fulfillment of basic psychological needs (e.g., autonomy and competence) are positively associated with goal attainment (Smith, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2007). These findings also suggested that the completion of goals predicted psychological well-being or general life satisfaction (Smith, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2007). In addition to the influence goals may have on the individual, they may also positively affect the team, as team goal setting exercises have been found to favorably impact the sustainability (Senecal, Loughhead, & Bloom, 2008) and development of team cohesion (Yukelson, 1997).



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The Pre-Game Speech

Unlike the literature related to goals, but similar to the paucity of research that has focused on vision, little seems to be known about the motivational impact of the pre-game speech. Although classically popularized by analysts and movies, the motivational importance of pre-game speeches has been largely ignored. Vargas-Tonsing (2004; Vargas-Tonsing & Bartholomew, 2004) conducted two studies focused on pre-game speeches and found that pre-game speeches inspire and increase team efficacy. In one study, Vargas-Tonsing and Bartholomew (2004) compared three pre-recorded speeches: a control speech, a strategy-oriented speech, and an emotional speech, and found that the emotional speech left players with increased feelings of team efficacy. Additionally, the content of the speech is of particular note, as it included the coach's disclosure of personal and impassioned feelings about the upcoming game, as well as his/her desire for the team to perform with confidence, pride, and a sense of destiny (Vargas-Tonsing & Bartholomew, 2004).

Although more general in nature, in an analysis of 405 Nigerian university athletes, Adegbesan (2001) suggested that athletes are inspired and motivated by pep talks as well as messages on posters and bulletin boards. Additionally, McGowan (1988) proposed that coaches should be familiar with a variety of communication styles (e.g., directional, democratic, autocratic, etc.) in an effort to comfortably and flexibly employ varying approaches at appropriate times throughout a season. While McGowan's (1988) findings are focused on communication styles, one can not help but wonder if coaches would benefit their efforts by employing a variety of references and mediums when working to motivate their players. For example, would a coach more aptly motivate his/her athletes with the combined use of speeches, quotes, music, film, photographs, program history, school expectations, etc.? While little is known about how to best inspire athletes through speeches and pep-type efforts, Hardy, Burke, and Crace (2005) conclude, "The most effective messages are those that reach the heart – if you can inspire emotion in the listener, a behavior change will likely occur" (p. 196).

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, considerable efforts have been made to explore motivation in a variety of contexts and disciplines (e.g., management, education, sport, etc.). Similarly, a great deal of research has been dedicated to the presence of specific motivational constructs within sport (e.g., achievement goals, intrinsic/extrinsic motives, etc.). However, fewer studies have focused on exploring how coaches motivate. After further assessing the literature dedicated to the motivational efforts of coaches, more research is needed to further understand what they are doing and how they are doing it. Coaches serve a unique role as professional motivators, yet little seems to be understood about the specific motivational methods they actively employ. In addressing such a concern, it would seem appropriate to sit down with several highly



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accomplished coaches and discuss motivational efforts and rationale. Gaining insight directly from coaches may prove vital in further understanding how coaches motivate and how motivational efforts can best be employed in sport. In exploring such topics, current and future coaches may gain valuable insight into motivation; areas for further empirical study may be illuminated, while the existing gap in the literature that pertains to the topic may narrow.

Methodology

The principal investigator's interest in qualitatively assessing lacrosse coaches' efforts to motivate their teams is based on years of experience in the world of lacrosse, coaching and research regarding motivation. The principal investigator has a longstanding history as a player and coach in the world of lacrosse, spanning a variety of levels that range from college and high school coaching to professional and international playing experience. Through intensive study in motivation and qualitative methods, the principal investigator began to see lacrosse as an apt research area, given the accessibility of its coaches and the passion with which they carry out their jobs. In carrying through with this particular study, what follows is a detailed account of the methodology carried out.

A criterion sample was defined, and an extreme case, purposive sample of convenience was used (Patton, 2002). Elite men's lacrosse coaches ($N = 6$), all of whom have coached with an international team were interviewed. The sample criteria limited the study to men's coaches who have coached with a national team (i.e., Ireland, Italy, or USA) that competed in the World Lacrosse Championships, as such a distinction is widely considered a pinnacle achievement in the world of lacrosse coaching. While coaching an international team is a fine distinction, it is generally recognized as a temporary assignment, and hardly represents the complete body of a coach's work. In addition to their international coaching experiences, the sample represented coaches with various professional experiences and distinctions (i.e., NCAA Tournament and Championship Experience, State Championship and Tournament Experience, etc.). Participants were specifically asked to respond in accordance to their career coaching, and drew on their experiences coaching college and high school lacrosse to answer each question.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the identified coaches, and each interview proved to be more of a conversational discourse between the coach and the primary investigator. Interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy, and averaged one hour in length. Interviews were based on a series of questions designed by the primary investigator and intended to explore practices and beliefs associated with team culture and motivation. The initial series of questions were reviewed and critiqued by a licensed psychologist and faculty member who has an extensive background in social and sport psychology. Additionally, months prior to the formal interviews, an elite Division III lacrosse coach who did not have international coaching experience volunteered to practice the interview and further discuss the effectiveness of the



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questions. The focus of this paper is on the responses to the following three questions, which pertain to motivational efforts and beliefs:

1. How do you establish and discuss goals/vision with your team? And describe some from years past.
2. How do you motivate your team, and what do you generally motivate them to do (e.g., win, maintain confidence, execute, get good grades, be good people, etc.)?
3. What types of stories do you share with your team throughout a season, and what are their purpose (e.g., stories about historic players, stories about teams from the past, personal anecdotes, etc.)?

After the completion of the six interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to facilitate the use of a modified version of interpretive analysis (Hatch, 2002). Through this type of analysis the following steps were taken: the data was reviewed with the expectation of identifying emergent themes, impressions of the data were recorded and categorized, codes and categories were developed and refined in accordance with discussion between two additional researchers, and excerpts/quotes were identified to exemplify the final codes and categories (Hatch, 2002).

The objectivity and reliability of the final report was enhanced through the use of two forms of triangulation: data and investigator triangulation (Patton, 2002, p. 247). Investigator triangulation refers to the principal investigator's use of feedback from two additional researchers. The three researchers independently reviewed and analyzed the data, and met to develop a consensus regarding codes, categories, and themes. Data was triangulated through contrasting and comparing the responses of the various participants. The completed findings and final report were independently reviewed and assessed by an expert in qualitative research and methods so as to further enhance reliability.

Results

All coaches interviewed expressed a palpable passion for their sport, job, and the charge of motivating young athletes. Participants shared numerous stories and tactics with regard to motivation, and seemed fully invested in their efforts to inspire their teams. In response to the interviews and data collected, three general themes representing varying brands of motivational effort expressed by the participants were developed: Personal Responsibility, Tools, and Transcendence. The names of these themes and the categories comprising them were developed by the researchers, and are intended to adequately represent the data they reflect.

Of note was the relative consistency with which participants spoke about motivational tactics and approaches. There proved to be considerable overlap between the methods each coach used, and



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there also appeared to be a similar degree of commitment by each coach to the three categories identified. In other words, each individual coach seemed to share some degree of commitment to each of the three categories captured. When this phenomenon was considered a model representing the coaches' efforts to motivate, their athletes seemed to naturally emerge.

Personal Responsibility

In working to identify and categorize the tactics the coaches used to motivate their athletes, it became apparent that the coaches took tremendous responsibility on themselves. As leaders, the coaches spoke of three general sub-themes of personal expectation and responsibility: Interpersonal Growth, Personal Attitude, and Respect for Individuality. These sub-themes comprised the larger theme of Personal Responsibility, as they have been identified as unique efforts intended to assist with the general motivation of the athletes these coaches lead.

Interpersonal Growth pertains to a coach's willingness to grow, develop, change and advance. Two coaches in particular identified this category as a critical component to their continued success. As discussed by these coaches, their efforts to maintain a degree of flexibility and open mindedness allowed for beneficial advancements throughout their careers. One coach reflected on his early efforts to motivate, and his openness to changing for the benefit of his players. He recalled that "I used to be the motivating guy that would have to do everything but stand on my head in the locker room the night before a game and the day of a game to really get the guys fired up. I don't do much of that anymore ... [now] I just talk to guys." In keeping a lower and calmer profile, this coach believes that a less flamboyant, yet deeper and more consistent connection may prove more motivating to players over a sustained period of time. He prefers to talk with players in his office, maintain constant communication regarding goals and objectives, and reiterate such points come game time. Similarly, the coach with the most experience and achievements (several Division I National Championships and numerous league titles) quite simply stated that "you have to keep up with the times ..." He did so by hiring young assistants who could relate to his players while maintaining high energy, and believed that a coach has to be willing to meet his players at their level. In short, these coaches saw a value in staying current and flexible, as they could relate more effectively to their players.

All of the coaches interviewed shared the perspective that their Personal Attitude harbored tremendous motivational force. They identified various traits and behaviors they expected of themselves, and hoped to see reflected in their athletes. From diligence and persistence to honesty, selflessness and humor, coaches suggested that their efforts to project consistent character traits would prove inherently motivating to their athletes. Regarding his own brand of integrity as well as expectations for his players, one coach stated, "If I'm asking them to do something, then I had better be able to deliver the same thing back. Kids are smart. If you're a phony, they're gonna see right through ya, real quick." This particular coach went on to



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reference the nearly 20 years he had refused to drink alcohol in his hometown, as he could not justify drinking alcohol when he has asked his players not to. To this end, coaches believed they could model and inspire motivating traits that would prove beneficial to their players' success. They established overt expectations and held the entire team to them. Later in the interview, this coach spoke of the lessons he worked to impart by holding players who did drink accountable for their actions. Another coach spoke of the importance of "care" in his program, and how he reflected this value: "We use the ethic of caring. We care about them ... We don't guarantee them playing time, but we do everything we can to see that they graduate." Coaches also mentioned the importance of staying positive regardless of the score or win/loss record. One coach succinctly said, "I don't dwell on the negative," while another stated, "If you do something good today then just grow with it." In this regard, these coaches projected specific ideals and took it upon themselves to model and exhibit the traits they resonated with.

Coaches also expressed a sincere regard for the individual process related to motivation. At the suggestion of one of his players, one coach built this construct into his team's pre-game warm-up, affording players the time and space to do what they need to do as individuals to mentally prepare. Regarding the choice to incorporate an individually focused pre-game routine, the coach stated "a lot of guys love it. It just says go do your thing, get yourself ready ... whether you're a rah-rah guy or a quiet guy, whether you listen to music or read a book, whether you need to use the men's room or you just want to close your eyes for a couple of minutes." Additionally, other coaches reflected the importance of honoring their athlete's individual goals and shaping expectations accordingly. One coach stated "we're talking about matching their level of commitment, their level of play to their personality and whatever their personal goals are." In this regard, coaches seemed committed to each player's personal journey. To further exemplify, one coach spoke of assisting individual players in finding the right college choice, while another detailed an exercise that allowed players to express their personal intrigue and commitment to the team by having them research and report on past players who wore their jersey number.

Throughout the interviews, coaches seemed to take on a great deal of responsibility for how they carry themselves and interact with their athletes. They projected a standard of expectation for themselves, and seemed to implicitly challenge their athletes to match their effort, integrity, and passion for the team by modeling expectation and holding their players accountable to match the standards they set. These coaches seemed committed to personal growth and specific traits, while also presenting a degree of openness to the individuality and internal drive among their players. The coaches seemed to develop a motivational foundation for their athletes within themselves, and then extended themselves accordingly through additional motivational methods.



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Tools

In their efforts to motivate, the participants certainly did not stop with themselves. They drew on a number of motivational tactics to further prod and coax their athletes toward heightened levels of success. In assessing the data, four specific sub-themes related to this concept emerged: Goal Setting, Rewards, Punishment/Accountability, and Environment. These tools were used to instigate further effort among the athletes and teams the participants coached, and were frequently present and discussed throughout the interviews.

Goal Setting proved to be a consistent item in all of the participants' motivational repertoires. Although coaches used varying goal setting techniques, they all seemed to employ some degree of goal setting into their programs. Interestingly, the variance regarding goal setting efforts and exercises was notable, as coaches all seemed to impress their own brand of goal setting on their teams. Coaches mentioned short and long term goals, academic and sport goals, goals specific to the varying positions on the field, the development and monitoring of goal charts for each game, and the difference between personal and team goals. One coach who worked to impress the importance of team over individual goals commented, "I tend to not be one of those guys who wants to see a kid break down his individual goals cause that sets his mind that individual goals are very, very important." Regardless of how goals are implemented or what they pertained to, the coaches saw a place for goals in the context of their team's efforts. In summarizing the impact goal setting seemed to have on each coach's programs, perhaps the most eloquent portrayal of goal setting was expressed nearly verbatim by two coaches: "to get a little better, that's our basic goal. Something, in some way, make yourself a little better," and "there should be a goal every day, and every day one of your goals should be: You're a better team than you were the day before."

Rewards were also mentioned with some degree of consistency between each of the coaches. While the rewards mentioned ranged from larger life rewards such as graduation and job preparation to more tangible prizes, coaches seemed cognizant of the value and motivational impact rewards could have on their athletes. Two coaches spoke of token rewards that were handed out to valuable players after wins or exceptional performances. While these rewards may have been as minor as a sticker or a poster, they took on considerable value within the context of the team and were regarded as something to strive for. As one coach mentioned with regard to such seemingly trivial rewards, "That's important to them." Such rewards represent effort and excellence within the team construct and recognize the few individuals who embody the team's values in times of success. While not as concrete, coaches also spoke of the rewards of education, pride, and accomplishment for players who stick with a program and give of themselves. As one coach articulated, even players who do not play have incentives for staying with the team, as "it's still exciting to be a part of, it's still prestigious to be a part of, and it's still going to help you in your future".



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As with Rewards, Punishment/Accountability was also seen as a significant motivating force. Coaches spoke of cutting players who were unwilling to meet team expectations on and off the field. They mentioned putting teams on the end line and having them run sprints during lackluster practices. Similarly, they talked about sitting players who were not performing or listening, and of not going out of their way to recommend players to college programs and/or jobs if they were not reliable during their tenure as a player. One coach spoke of a hypothetical example in which a player was not performing in class and was not completing assignments. He said, "If I'm aware of that, I can either sit the kid out at game time or have the kid run some sprints. There's accountability in the program, and that's a big, big part of making kids responsible." In this regard there was not only a punishment, but there was an identified reason and purpose. The coaches wanted to push their players to be better in a variety of facets of their lives, and were willing to punish them with sprints, playing time, or even cutting them if the greater good could be served. Finally, as one coach emphasized, "It could be the best kid, if he's a jerk, he's gone. A lot of people will say that, but we do it, and I mean Division I First-Team All Americans tossed." The coach went on to relay a specific anecdote in which two exceptional high school players caught drinking alcohol were subsequently dismissed from the team. The team suffered, losing a championship because of their star players' absences, but the individuals learned valuable lessons and went on to graduate college and have celebrated collegiate careers. In the end the coach affirmed, "But I would do it again ... I think it's the right thing to do."

Environment proved to be an intriguing sub-theme, as the participants noted a variety of external factors they manipulated with the intention of motivating their teams. Although the Environment may extend beyond the control of the coaches, they used specific elements to motivate and excite their players. The coaches seemed to manipulate certain factors within the environment to increase motivation, while articulating factors out of their control in motivating ways. For example, two coaches spoke of the motivational impact of internal competition with one coach stating, "You want that healthy competition, that healthy competitiveness on your team because it motivates the kids everyday. It pushes them." While something like internal competition can be fostered from the coach, other elements, like the school and the league are well beyond the coaches' control. However, the participants spoke of how they emphasized the value and motivational influence of playing for an Ivy League school, for a service academy, or in an elite conference. The participants drew on the history and prestige of their environment to further motivate and drive their players.

With the use of these tools, coaches worked to motivate and inspire in a variety of methods. Coaches utilized the motivational power of Goals, as well as the tools of Rewards and Punishments/Accountability so as to drive their teams toward considerable success. While no one element would seem more beneficial than another, coaches drew on a number of techniques to inspire and advance their players, fostering growth and continued effort.



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Transcendence

Perhaps the most difficult theme to label, Transcendence seemed to be an ethereal concept that related to a brand of motivation associated with something extending beyond the team, something meaningful beyond lacrosse, something transcending the game. The participants all spoke of the importance of perceiving the game as something bigger than it is, and told numerous stories of life lessons related to practice, playing at one's best, and individuals who typify an inspiring mindset. In this sense, the participants seemed to motivate their athletes by emphasizing the value of effort and determination in a context beyond sport. To further define this theme, two sub-themes were developed: Life Lessons and Legacy.

The coaches spoke of the legacy their athletes had the opportunity and potential to leave, as well as the legacy with which they were associated. The Legacy piece seemed to motivate in two ways. Not only did players have an opportunity to leave a legacy, they also had an opportunity to further contribute and/or be a part of an established legacy. One coach explained an exercise he developed for his team, in which players researched those who wore their jersey before them. He spoke of the value related to connecting present players to the players of the past, and stated, "I try to give them a bigger picture than just their immediate one year or four years, depending on how they're looking at it, and letting them know that they are in something that is really, really cool." While this coach worked to motivate current players by connecting them to their historic counterparts, other coaches spoke of their efforts to remind players they too can give back and leave their mark. One coach spoke of the importance of developing leaders and emphasized the value of encouraging older players to extend themselves to younger players, stating, "A freshman is paired up with a senior, and the senior is responsible for helping him get through his freshman year and reports back to me if there are any big issues going on." In this system the seniors are encouraged to develop leadership skills while also being encouraged to leave their impression on the program by assisting and guiding the future.

The participants also spoke of perceiving a season as a metaphor for life, hitting challenges head-on and working to overcome them in respectable and righteous terms. They emphasized the opportunity to impart Life Lessons on their players, and seemed to perceive the lacrosse experience as a microcosm for life at large. As one coach stated, "there's always some crisis every year, and how you deal with that crisis has a lot to do with how your season goes." To these coaches a season was more than a series of practices and games; it was an opportunity to prepare young men for the larger challenges of life. One coach recalled an accident in which a player died in pre-game warm-ups, stating that "we just remind guys that it is a game, and that they are playing and representing [their institution]." To this coach, life experiences are humbling and valuable in assisting players to maintain perspective regarding what they do, why they do it, and who they are representing. An additional coach spoke of the urgency of life, and the short window of time one has to pursue their goals and make an impact. In urging players to



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contribute their best now, the coach passionately stated, “one of my big things ... is every day that you piss away an opportunity, you can never have that opportunity again.” To this end, these coaches wanted players to see wasted time as wasted opportunity. In the spirit of this sentiment, lacrosse seems to be an opportunity for these coaches to teach and assist their players to grow in ways extending far beyond the field of play.

Although this notion of motivating through transcendent means through Legacy and Life Lessons may be difficult to convey, the participants frequently addressed these points in the context of stories. The coaches spoke about players who stayed connected with their programs in effort to emphasize the individual legacy one player can have. They spoke of previous seasons in which lessons were learned, or specific individuals who were particularly inspiring. They mentioned daily messages they worked to convey at practice, and the value of allowing student-athletes to define their own experiences and develop their own stories. They shared personal stories of overcoming adversity, and how they related their personal struggles to the struggles of their individual players and teams. While Transcendence may have proved difficult to define as a clear and succinct motivational category, its impact and power seems poignant and genuine. These coaches saw lacrosse as a teaching tool, and worked to motivate by reminding athletes to see more to life than the game, and the game as a means to learn more about life. In summarizing the perceived power of lacrosse as a teacher, one coach stated, “for the most part, the people who are in lacrosse are supportive people, positive people, and successful people. It’s a fraternity, and it’s different than any other sport. It’s a special sport with special people, and that’s what I try to reinforce with my kids.”

Model

In assessing the responses of the coaches who participated in this study, there proved to be tremendous overlap between the methods of one coach and another. To follow is a model that represents the manner in which the three main motivational themes may be employed to equally and synchronously motivate athletes and teams. The model has been presented as such because the coaches began with a defining sense of self that was actualized through tangible tools, and intended to intertwine with larger motivators that inspired the coaches to be who they were. Each coach articulated a Personal Responsibility that related to their individual growth and attitude, and the respect for their player’s individuality. Through this category coaches defined themselves, and in so doing established expectations for their athletes. When these expectations were not met, the coaches had tangible and practical tools to further motivate their players toward success. For these coaches, motivational opportunities and efforts extended beyond individual respect, sprints and exercises, and included larger life lessons as well as opportunities to give of oneself toward a legacy. These coaches emphasized the importance of player participation by tying it back to the history of the school and the value lacrosse could have on player’s lives. In focusing on these transcendent themes, coaches further defined themselves. As

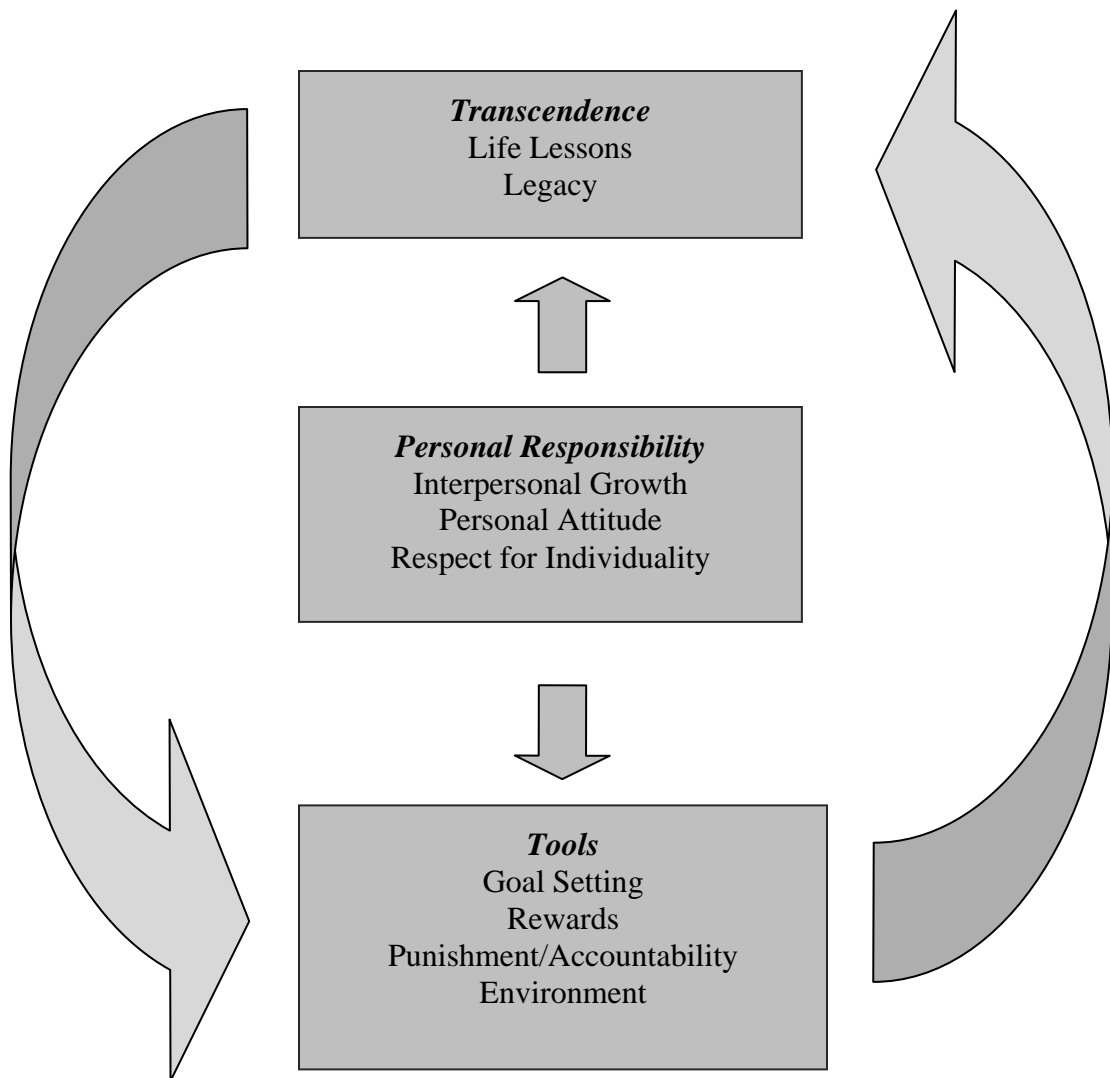


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is mentioned in the last quote, these coaches believed in the importance of what they were doing, and used that as motivation to further push themselves to stay fresh and dedicated to the players they serve. In this regard, there is a cyclical nature to the efforts these coaches made to motivate their athletes toward sustained success.



Figure 1



Discussion

This research was intended to explore the efforts elite lacrosse coaches make to motivate their teams and athletes. It focused on six male coaches who have all reached the international ranks of coaching while also maintaining prestigious professional coaching careers in men's lacrosse. A number of motivational efforts were highlighted and identified, all of which shed significant light on a subject in which there has been little explanation. It was noted by all investigators that the coaches displayed passion for the subject matter, discussing their motivational efforts with a candor and detail that was expressive of considerable thought, planning, and experience. Additionally, the opportunity to speak with these coaches through a qualitative design afforded a rich data set that will ideally inspire future research efforts.

Revisiting the Literature

In relating this research to existing literature, it is certainly more specific than the general research pertaining to achievement goals (Duda & Hall, 2001; Grant & Dweck, 2003), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Vallerand & Perreault, 1999; Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001), and attribution theory (Biddle, Hanrahan, & Sellars, 2001; Singer & Orbach, 1999). While such motivational constructs may be relevant to the motivational efforts these coaches discussed, the efforts captured speak to how coaches actively motivate and the principles guiding their efforts. Additionally, the research reported herein explores a variety of efforts as opposed to one (e.g., vision, goals, and pre-game speeches). In this regard, the tactic of qualitatively analyzing coaches' general motivational beliefs and specific efforts has yielded a broader conception of motivation in the coaching context. Similarly, in researching several coaches, these findings offer a perspective that extends beyond the more singular efforts captured by the Tarkanian Bloom, Crumpton, and Anderson (1999) and Wooden (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976) studies. Finally, this research would seemingly overlap nicely with a more invasive study regarding team climate (Ames & Archer, 1988; Cain & Dweck, 1995; Duda, Chi, Newton, Walling, & Catley, 1995; Nicholls, Patashnick, & Bobbit Nolen, 1985), as much of what these coaches articulate relates back to the climate they are working to develop and maintain. With that said, much can be built on methodologically from this research, as more intensive efforts may prove fruitful in determining whether some of the motivational methods outlined are truly motivational, truly used, and how they actually impact players. For example, coaches could be talking about things they do not actively do, or their methods may not truly motivate the athletes they serve. A more detailed analysis of these coaches coaching as well as player feedback could provide valuable information that would serve to enrich the data set and analysis.

In addressing some setbacks to this study, the small and homogenous sample size should be accommodated for in future work. Including female coaches, coaches from other sports, and



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perhaps limiting coaches to the same professional background (e.g., collegiate coaches, Division I coaches, etc.) could prove beneficial. For example, interviews with professional football coaches may yield a dramatically different data set. Regardless, the data collected did produce significant insight into motivational methods that may exist far beyond the coaches and programs investigated through this study.

Future Implications

The data collected seemed to establish a genuine and supportive foundation for future research, as a variety of questions and concerns need to be addressed. Little is known about the nature and consistency of many of the motivational methods discussed, and there may prove to be ample opportunity for future investigation regarding additional sports, female coaches, and cultural variations to motivating athletes. Additionally, how are such motivational efforts expressed throughout a season? Are they employed daily, through locker room photos and posters, through media interviews, pre-season exercises, etc? How do such methods impact motivational constructs readily researched and written about (i.e., Motivational Climate, Achievement Goals, Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivation, etc.)? How do such methods work, and how influential is one method over another? Can players be truly motivated by a coach's individual growth, or a consistent series of rewards, and do these techniques yield differing results? Finally, is there universality to such motivational methods? Do certain methods impact athletes on a global level, which ones are most effective, and could/are such methods employed in non-sporting disciplines?

Practical Implications

This research is intended to inspire and aid the motivational efforts of existing coaches and coaching educators. These findings capture the perspectives of successful coaches, and are articulated in a manner that may serve to guide the motivational efforts of others. The individuals interviewed are 'in the trenches', relating real world stories of how they guide and motivate championship caliber athletes and teams. These individuals have devoted their professional lives to inspiring young athletes toward great achievements, and their ideas may also prove inspiring to current and future coaches. If nothing else, the specific exercises and/or practices (e.g., having athletes research the history of his/her jersey number) that these coaches have shared may provide other coaches and coaching educators with valuable ideas for motivating their athletes and/or students.

Additionally, the concepts articulated herein may serve coaches and coaching educators as a motivational guide. As per these findings, a coach must look inward, holding him/herself to an inspiring standard that ignites enthusiasm in those s/he leads. A coach must also creatively and continuously work to motivate his/her athletes with various tools. Employing a healthy mix of



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goal setting, rewards, accountability, etc., will likely keep athletes excited and focused on achieving daily challenges. Finally, coaches and coaching educators would be remiss if they looked past the transcendental potential their position and chosen sport offers ambitious men and women. Coaches and coaching educators will likely see a benefit in emphasizing the larger role athletics can play in ones life. By playing up the importance of the athletic experience, an athletes' motivation will likely increase.

In short, these findings may assist coaches and coaching educators to trouble-shoot when motivation is lackluster, or simply follow a set of guidelines as they work to motivate others toward continued success. There are rich lessons and ideas expressed throughout the findings that may aid coaches in developing their own set of motivational activities and practices. This research will ideally inspire coaches and coaching educators to think about how athletes are motivated and how a coach may be able to get that much more out of his/her team.



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Figure 2
Practical Implications: Shared Exercises and Ideas

Personal Responsibility	Tools	Transcendence
Continually develop your approach through introspection and feedback.	Individual Goals (e.g., Establish a goal contract with players that captures on- and off-field goals – Grades, team contribution, etc. – That will be revisited throughout the season)	Legacy (e.g., Team mentoring – An underclassman is partnered with an upperclassman)
Relate to players (e.g., Rely on a young assistant to bridge any generation gaps)	Team Goals (e.g., Have the team determine five stat categories and come up with game goals for each - Track the stats throughout the season and talk with them about their successes and/or areas that need improvement)	Part of History (e.g., Players research the history of their jersey number – who wore it and when)
Practice what you preach (e.g., If you ask them not to drink, don't drink publicly)	Goal Charts (e.g., Post a goal chart in the locker room that monitors specific stats through the season and/or practice – Leading at halftime, holding opponents to less than x points, etc.)	Game as Metaphor (e.g., Point out life lessons to be learned from the game – When things become difficult refocus and try harder, Never give up, etc.)
Empower (e.g., Ask the players what they think is working and/or needs fixing during a time-out or half time)	Rewards (e.g., Stickers, posters, tokens, etc.)	Learn from Life (e.g., Draw from stories outside the playing field - Engage in public service to emphasize humility and appreciation for the game)
Stimulate team awareness and commitment (e.g., Develop a strong alumni tradition that allows current players to hear the passion of past players – Alumni game, networking events)	Punishment/Accountability (e.g., Sprints, loss of playing time, team suspension or release)	Urgency (e.g., Speak with athletes about how fleeting their career is, have alumni share the importance of not wasting time, encourage seniors to share how fast four years goes)
Encourage Player Responsibility (e.g., Ask players what they would do to rectify team issues)	Environment (e.g., Remind players of the institution they represent by talking to them about history, rivalries, and expectations of the school – Honor institutional traditions with the team)	Daily Messages (e.g., Post an inspiring quote on the locker room bulletin board, ask players their thoughts and how it applies to the team at a break in practice)



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Summary

Listening to elite coaches talk about the motivational methods they use to inspire and motivate their athletes proved to be an enlightening and eye-opening exercise. There would seem to be a rich storehouse of methods and tactics that are currently being employed by coaching practitioners about which little is known. While much has been written and researched about motivation in the sporting context, there is still much to be explained and discovered. Coaches have a unique insight into this material, yet few studies have afforded them the opportunity to share their experiences and ideas. Beyond the data collected or any value its analysis may have, the opportunity to share the words and practices of skilled coaches was a wonderful and humbling experience that will ideally inspire others to partake in similar lines of inquiry.



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