



Creating and Sustaining a Culture of Excellence: Insights From Accomplished University Team-Sport Coaches

Daniela Donoso-Morales, Gordon A. Bloom, and Jeffrey G. Caron

McGill University

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Winning several national championships is an extraordinary feat that very few university coaches have accomplished. The objective of this study was to investigate how some of Canada's most accomplished university team-sport coaches created and sustained a culture of excellence in their programs. **Method:** Six university coaches who had won more than 30 national titles participated in this study. Each coach participated in a semistructured interview, and the qualitative data were inductively analyzed using a thematic analysis. **Results:** The coaches noted that hard work and daily attention to detail, effective emotional management of themselves and their athletes, and continuous self-assessment (self-reflection and seeking mentors) were crucial elements that led to sustained excellence in their programs. **Conclusions:** This study offers one of the first empirical accounts of how highly successful university coaches developed and maintained a culture of excellence and success in their high-performance sport setting.

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Emotional intelligence; high performance; leadership; mentoring; sports coaching

From 1970 to 2008, 872 articles were published in the field of coaching science, including 113 devoted to coaching effectiveness. Côté and Gilbert (2009) defined coaching effectiveness as the “consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts” (p. 316). Researchers have noted that effective coaching occurs both on and off the field of play; off the field, coaches use sport as a way to teach and instill life skills (Bloom, Falcão, & Caron, 2014), and on the field, coaches use their knowledge and organizational and teaching skills to influence their athletes’ performance and satisfaction (Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, & Chung, 2002; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001). Moreover, effective coaching skills have positively influenced team success at all levels of sport, including city, provincial/state, national, and world levels (e.g., Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Specific to university/college sport, winning one national championship is a difficult task for any coach, but winning several national championships is an extraordinary feat that very few coaches have accomplished.

During the course of a 35-year tenure, Coach Russ Rose has had a career-winning percentage greater than 85% and has won six national championships,

including four consecutive titles from 2007 to 2010. Yukelson and Rose (2014) reflected on the factors that contributed to Coach Rose’s ongoing excellence in the American university sport setting. Among their conclusions, they stated that Coach Rose’s continuous success was attributed to athlete accountability and to getting athletes to buy in to his yearly plan. In a similar manner, Vallée and Bloom (2016) described the factors that helped a Canadian university women’s basketball team win five consecutive national championships. The authors attributed Coach Vallée’s success to four “keys,” which included enacting a coaching vision, empowering athletes, teaching life skills to athletes, and lifelong learning and personal reflection from the coach. Specific to the coaching vision, Coach Vallée created a blueprint for her team that outlined how to create a culture that would produce a national championship. The blueprint detailed information both on and off the court that would lead the program to success, including but not limited to recruiting and developing the skills of talented athletes and ensuring that all athletes grew as people while they were part of the program. Although both reports presented insightful and practical coaching information, they focused on the perspective of just one university coach and the factors each coach felt enhanced both the regular-season and postseason success of their programs.