



Investigating the process through which National Hockey League Player Development Coaches 'develop' athletes: An exploratory qualitative analysis

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Player Development Coaches (PDC) in professional sports demonstrates recognition for the importance of fostering personal and professional development. Nonetheless, the processes by which PDCs facilitate such development are largely unknown. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions, experiences, and responsibilities of current/former National Hockey League (NHL) PDCs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight experienced NHL PDCs ($M_{\text{age}} = 50.5$, $SD = 9.7$). The PDCs reported working closely with athletes to oversee their development, which involved frequent meetings and evaluation of performances. They also described the necessity of establishing trust and ensuring transparency with their athletes, providing support (e.g., emotional), and engaging in reflective practice. In using these sport specific, relational, and introspective competencies, player development coaches guide athletes towards various professional (e.g., physical, psychological performance) and personal developmental outcomes (e.g., character). The findings indicate that PDCs act similarly to mentors, whereby the pillars of trust and respect are central to their perceived ability to impact athlete's personal and professional development. In conclusion, in order to expedite the ultimate performance goal of getting athletes into the NHL, PDCs work collaboratively to reinforce and develop a range of developmental assets that span from improvements in performance to personal growth.


Lay Summary: Eight player development coaches were interviewed to examine how they helped their athletes develop into full-time National Hockey League players. These individuals reported the importance of developing trusting relationships with their athletes, monitoring athlete performance/progress, and providing them with the necessary resources to facilitate sport-specific skill development as well as healthy and desirable personal growth.

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Regardless of age or level of competition, coaches are largely responsible for shaping the sport environment, and as a consequence, play a significant role in the development of athletes (Bloom, Falcão, & Caron, 2014; Gilbert & Trudel, 2004; Trudel, 2006). As such, a

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